

The King's Wish

T. G. MARQUIS





to Estelle

from the man who
designed and made
the book. E.J.W.

100



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THE KING'S WISH

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By

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Clip Cut Decorations by L. Hummel



THE RYERSON BOOKSHELF



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CHAPTER I

TOWARDS evening Dame Fedora sat in her neatly-kept clay hut, bemoaning the loss of her little shepherd. She was a poor woman and depended entirely on her few sheep and her little garden for her living. The plot of ground about her cottage she could attend to herself, but she was too old to go out day by day with the sheep to their hillside pastures. She had adopted a little lad named Roderigo, who had been a faithful guardian of her flock; but one day, when the mountain winds had been blowing with unusual severity, Roderigo returned home flushed and feverish, and never left the cottage till he was carried out to the little grassy plot where the roses grew in luxurious richness, and Fedora with her own hands threw the earth over his body. For several days she managed to go with her sheep and watch them till folding-time; but her old joints ached, so that she began to despair and longed for some one who might take Roderigo's place.

"I will have to sell my sheep," she moaned, as she rubbed her aching limbs. "I cannot go with them to the hillside slopes again. O these thieving

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mountaineers! but for them I could let my pets go without a watcher. How I wish our good King would but come to the mountains with his army and rout them out! It is disgraceful to have such vipers in one's kingdom. If I were monarch for a single day I would drive every one of them into the far sea. Poor Roderigo! and you used to say that you would do it when you grew up and that then my sheep might roam as far up the hills as they liked! And you would—but now! but now!—” and the old woman, between thoughts of her troubles and the memory of her little Roderigo, completely broke down and rocked to and fro, moaning out her grief.

She was suddenly interrupted by hurried cries of “The mountain robbers!” Terror made her dry her eyes, and, rushing to the door of her hut, she looked towards the hills, and saw a long, dark line winding slowly down the mountain side. Her neighbor Juanita was right. There they were, sure enough; and what was to be done! Juanita urged her to flee to the city. They had a good start, and they might fall in with some travellers by the way who would help them on their journey.

“No, no!” cried Fedora; “I cannot move a step; my joints are breaking now from the mountain winds; and, besides, I will not leave my flock to this thieving band. No, I will die with them first!”

“Please yourself, Mother Fedora! They can

have my little garden to themselves; I will be glad to escape with my life."

As she said this she hastily turned and set out towards the distant city that lay like a silver speck in the green valley miles away.

Fedora watched the dark line coming nearer and nearer through the gathering night. "Surely," she said to herself, "they cannot be about to attack the village. Well, it is what I said would happen if they didn't attend to these thieves. I suppose they will send me to join Roderigo, but they'll not get my property without a struggle," and the courageous old woman shook her toil-worn hand towards the advancing enemy.

As they came nearer, she entered her cottage, and taking from the wall a villainous-looking weapon—half sword, half scythe—she placed herself in the doorway, and waited for the enemy with a look of determination on her face which seemed to dare them to battle.

The crowd advanced slowly and noiselessly. No exulting shout, no angry battle-cry reached the ear of Fedora. She had, in the olden days, when her good husband was alive, seen several robber raids, but they were always accompanied with fierce war shouts, and cries of joy at the hope of plunder.

"Humph!" she muttered, "they think it not worth their while, but I'll teach them that Fedora

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has not forgotten the lessons José taught her in years gone by." As she spoke she swung the sword around as if she had already an enemy within her reach.

Slowly the crowd advanced, until they had arrived at her very door, and then a poor half-clad skeleton stepped from among them and, extending his hands beseechingly, cried: "Give us to eat."

"Eat! you villain," she cried. "Get you gone, or I will cleave you to the chin."

"Mother Fedora," he cried, "we know your kind heart. You think we come as enemies; we do not. We have been plundered by the robbers beyond the hills. Our cattle have been killed, our crops destroyed, our tents burned; and after suffering all men could endure, we have been driven down into the land of our old enemies, without weapons, without food. It would be charity to kill us, but we are struggling to reach the city, and there we hope to be of service to the King. We would buy food if we could, but we have nothing to give in exchange except ourselves and our children, and you are in no need of slaves."

"I don't know about that," said Fedora, reluctantly, and lowering her weapon from its threatening position. "I have lost my boy Roderigo, who used to keep my little flock from wandering up into the country of you thieving rebels; and if you are in such need, why not offer some of your children in

exchange for food? I will not give you to eat, but I will sell you several fine, fat sheep for one of the ragged rascals I see there in the road."

"We have six boys," he said, "and we will give you any one of them in exchange for two sheep."

The boys were placed in a row before her, and she examined them with a critical eye.

"This one would never do," she said. "Starving for three days, you say? Well, I'm afraid he must have eaten like a young colt when he had food. No, no! no fat boy for me! Nor this one! I want no girl about my place; he would weep and fret from morn till night. Take his pale face away before I repent my bargain! What do you mean by presenting this lame one? A lot of good he'd be to me! I suppose you would have me carry him up the hill with the sheep in the morning, and then sit down and watch both him and the flock. No, no! I'll have none of this one. I want a boy who will be of some use, and one who can take Roderigo's place. Well, the other three are a more hopeful lot. But this one is too bold; I am much afraid he would soon try to take the mastery out of my hands; and that would be too bad, as it would only cause him a broken head." And the old woman chuckled at the idea of any one mastering her. "This is a sneak! No! Don't deny it! you can't look me in the face; you'd steal the very wool off my sheep. I have only one left, and I suppose

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I'll have to take him," and she turned to a little fellow with large, dark, dreamy eyes and long black ringlets that hung about his shoulders.

"Yes, this one will suit me," she said. "He's not like Roderigo, but I have no doubt he will be willing to learn. If he isn't I'll make him. What do you call him?"

"Ismael."

"Whose child is he?"

"He is an orphan," was the answer.

"No more Ismael for him; José will be his name after this."

The bargain was soon closed, and the hungry mob saw with delight two fat sheep led bleating from the fold. They made hurried preparations for a meal, and in the dark devoured the sheep while sitting about their fires. Refreshed, they were about to continue their march, when they were startled by the cry, "The soldiers!"

Sure enough, there in the distance was a company of cavalry speeding towards them. Fedora had heard the alarm, and came from her cottage where she had been giving José a hearty meal. When she saw the troops, she said: "I thought so! it's the work of Juanita; she has alarmed the whole country. Never fear, I'll not let them harm you. Wait here!"

With these words she walked towards the advancing troop. When near them she cried, "Halt!"

The soldiers all knew her, as she was a famous character on market days in the city, and laughingly obeyed her summons.

"What is your business up here?" she said.

"We have come to protect you from the robbers," the leader replied.

"Protect me!" she said, with disdain—"protect Juanita's maize patch, you mean. I want none of your protection."

"But," replied the soldier, "did we not see Juanita's cottage on fire a few moments ago?"

"No, you did not! It was the supper fire of a few poor half-starved men. They have just been making a meal off one of their boys."

"Off one of their boys, Fedora? Are you crazy?"

"Not exactly off his flesh and blood," said Fedora, laughing at her own wit; "but they have sold him to me for two sheep, and these they have devoured. You can sheathe your swords; you will find them willing prisoners. They have been plundered by another set of thieves, and are now ready to do whatever you may wish."

"Very lucky!" said the leader. "We are in need of men to work on the walls, and if these fellows prove themselves willing, it will not go hard with them."

The whole troop then advanced to the trembling band, who, at the sight of the glittering steel,

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threw themselves on their knees and begged for mercy.

"Rise," said the leader, "and go with us to the city. Be obedient and no harm will come to any of you!"

So the dusty crowd crept on through the darkness to the city nestling among the orange groves, and Fedora and José were left to themselves in the little clay hut that was Fedora's pride.

CHAPTER II

JUST as the first stray beams of morning light crept over the misty mountains, and stole into Fedora's cottage, the old woman awoke. Rising from her couch of clean meadow grass, she called to her little slave, who had an equally rude bed at the opposite side of the hut, "José, you idler, awake!"

But José only turned over on his side and dreamed on about his mountain home.

"José!" she cried in a louder tone. But still the little fellow heeded not.

"I suppose," she cried, seizing a block of wood and getting ready to hurl it at him, "you want me to call you Ismael; but no robber name will ever be uttered in my hut."

At the sound of the old familiar name the boy sat up, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him in amazement. He had been so hungry and fatigued on the previous night that he had passed through the scene at the door as in a dream. Even the meal that Fedora had given him only roused his spirits for a moment, and he had fallen into a deep sleep the instant it was finished. Now it dimly came back, and when Fedora exclaimed in thundering tones, "José, you indolent thief! are you never

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going to leave that bed!" he recalled the whole scene, even to the part where his name was changed, and instead of Ismael, the name little Zora, his playmate, pronounced with such a sweet voice, he was to be called José.

He was soon up and dressed, and after a simple breakfast of bread and fruit, Fedora told him he must go with her to the sheep pastures. She had quite a flock, and as she drove them up the mountain road she kept impressing on José that he had been a fearfully expensive servant to her, having cost her two whole sheep; and she pointed to the two fattest in the flock to make him understand her better. At last the pasture was reached, and they sat on the grassy hillside to see that the flock did not stray out of sight. Whenever a sheep would wander into forbidden ground, José was sent to drive it back. He did so with delight, for his active young limbs wanted the exercise; but as soon as he returned Fedora made him sit by her and lectured him on the necessity of being good and faithful—which meant taking care of her property, and obeying her every wish. She impressed upon José how she had saved him from starvation, and she did this so often and so forcibly that the little fellow, with tears in his eyes, again and again declared that he would struggle to repay her kindness.

When the sun stood high overhead and the sheep

lay about them in drowsy clumps, Fedora took her basket from behind a shady bush and drew from it a substantial piece of bread, a large cluster of grapes plucked from her own vines, and a tempting flagon of home-made wine. José had lived with a wandering tribe, who to-day had a feast and to-morrow were without food; and now he began to think that, despite his mistress's gruff voice and her readiness to use her hands about his ears, his life was going to be a very pleasant one in his new home. Certainly if she could be cross, she could be kind, and he was not stinted for food; and his mistress seemed well pleased with his healthy young appetite. The afternoon passed without any mishap; and, when at twilight the two followed the sheep down the hillside, little José's heart was as light and happy as it had ever been in the days when he had played with Zora. He lay down that night to dream she was with him; and they were gathering garlands to weave into crowns, as they played at king and queen.

For several days the same thing was repeated, and when Fedora thought José understood what was wanted of him she told him she was not going to the hillside with him again, and that he must watch the sheep for her; and woe be to him if one should stray from the flock.

José had learned to love his mistress; and as he slowly wound his way with his flock to the hills, he

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determined to give her no cause for complaint. He would not only be careful to see that they did not wander out of his sight and get lost, but he would select the places where the grass was longest and juiciest, that they might return to the fold every night fatter than when they went out in the morning.

It was a new pleasure to him to be trusted, and with the utmost delight he set about his task. The morning hours flew swiftly by, and at the time appointed for dinner he seated himself in the shade of an overhanging rock, and ate a hearty and well-earned meal. The sheep had had one long meal from early morning, so, while he was at his, they lay about and nodded in the sun.

When José had finished eating he sat with his back against the cool stone, and looked about him, eyeing his flock with pleasure. How Fedora's heart would delight as she saw them growing fatter and woollier under his care, he thought. Then his large, dreamy eyes wandered away into the valley where the silver stream threaded its course among orange groves and vineyards, past the white city that gleamed like a silver star in the green expanse about it. On and on went his mind, until he was out on the ocean where great ships that Philip, the peddler's son, had told him about, stood up higher than the highest pinnacles in the city. This was a bad pastime for the little shepherd, and his black

ringlets soon began to blow unheeded across his olive-tinted cheeks as the large eyes tried hard to keep open. At length they closed in sleep and he was a king, with Zora as queen, ruling over all the cities of the plain.

So sound was his sleep that he did not hear his flock rising leisurely about him, nibbling the grass at his feet, and then going farther and farther away. It was near sunset when he awoke, and to his horror not an animal could be seen. With a terrified cry he leaped to his feet and rushed from his shelter, but still none were in sight. On and on up the hill he went, until at last, near the edge of a wood, where Fedora had warned him a savage wolf had its hold, he saw a few straggling sheep. With eager haste he ran hither and thither, until he thought all were gathered together, and then, with slow gait and a heavy heart, he began to drive them homewards.

Mother Fedora had had a lonely day of it in her little garden, and she hailed with delight the re-appearance of her little shepherd.

"So, my lad," she said, with kindly gruffness, "you have brought my treasures back to me."

As José timidly drove them into the fold she glanced her eye over them, and suddenly, with a cry of rage, exclaimed: "Oh, you young thief! you have stolen my fattest pet. Where is it, you

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thief?" and she seized José by the shoulder and struck him a ringing box on the ear.

"Have you eaten him?" she cried, and in her rage she shook him till his teeth chattered.

For a time the poor lad could not find his voice to reply, but at length he mustered enough courage to say between his sobs, "I fell asleep, and—perhaps—it wandered away."

"Fell asleep, did you?" cried the angry woman, striking him such a blow that he fell helpless to the ground. "It wasn't enough that you cost me two sheep, but now my fattest has gone; well! not a bite will you get until it has been found."

As she scolded on, she drove the sheep into the fold, and when the door was securely bolted, she seized the trembling boy by the shoulder and dragged him up the hill. High and low they hunted, up hill and down dale, but no trace of the missing one could be seen. At last, when the stars were all out in the clear summer sky, Fedora gave up hope and retraced her steps to her cottage, scolding all the way.

José was sent to bed hungry, and soon sobbed himself to sleep. Long after midnight he woke with a start; something was pattering about the cottage! Could it be the stray sheep? He rose and walked to the cottage door on tiptoe for fear of waking Fedora; and his hopes were realized, for he heard a gentle, timid bleat. With eager, silent

fingers he raised the bar that guarded the door. The sheep was standing by the pen, and he was not long in getting it in among its fellows. He then stole back to the cottage, and succeeded in regaining his couch without rousing his mistress.

Fedora was in a very crisp and crusty humor in the morning. She thought she would have to go to the hills again. She had hoped that José would have been able to take Roderigo's place, but she could not afford to lose her sheep. She gave him a very scanty breakfast, and kept from him, what had made all his former meals pleasant—kind words.

The two went to the fold together, and when the door was opened the flock trooped out in pairs. As the last pair leaped out in the sunshine and began to browse the dew-sprinkled grass, Mother Fedora uttered an amazed cry. She looked at José with a compassionate look, as much as to say: "Forgive my cruelty. I made a mistake; they are all here." But she was too proud a woman to say so. Instead she exclaimed: "I will not go with you to-day; only be sure you keep awake, or it will not go well with you."

As the little fellow was about to march away with his flock she gave him a motherly kiss, and bestowed more grapes and oranges on him, for his noonday meal, than he had ever had before. He was

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forgiven; with a light heart he went to his day's work, determined to do his duty manfully.

When noon came José was reluctant to take his meal, fearing lest the previous day's experience would be repeated; but he chose the most uncomfortable place he could find among the rocks and turned his face from the pleasing valley to the gloomy mountain tops, and there, unsheltered under the glaring sun, he ate his simple meal. But nothing seemed to avail him. He was a young dreamer, and his thoughts began to wander up the hillside, through the forest, and into the place where he had been with Zora but a few days ago, and he was soon playing about among the tents of his people, unheeding the sheep that he had so earnestly resolved to watch with such care.

But he had a rude awakening. Just as he thought himself a mighty warrior leading home captives by thousands to his castle prison, he received a blow that stretched him on the ground.

"So," cried Mother Fedora, "you thought I was going to leave you here to yourself to let my sheep wander away to be devoured by some of your robber friends, who, I expect, are still lurking in the hills. Wake up!"

But the little fellow was stunned, and it was not till Fedora had brought a bowl of water from the spring near by and bathed his face that he opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he cried.

"Where are you?" she answered. "A nice question, when you know the trouble you caused me last night by your sleepy indolence. Wake up!" and she shook him angrily.

But the poor little fellow seemed so weak and looked so pale and helpless that her heart relented, and she gave him a little of the wine that was left from his noonday meal.

"Here, take this," she cried; "and why did you sit here in the sun? It is a wonder it didn't kill you. Go and rest there in the shade and I'll attend to the flock."

The unhappy young dreamer dragged himself to the sheltering rock, and lying there on the soft turf he fell into a deep sleep. Fedora did not wake him till folding-time came, and then the two went home: the one with a heavy heart, the other with deep misgivings lest the boy that had cost her "two whole sheep" was after all going to be nothing but a burden. However, she determined to give him another trial.

That night, after José had been sent to bed, Fedora stood at her door looking out at the stars that were creeping slowly across the sky. She too had her dreams, and as she looked out on the cloudless night, she began to wonder if, when she was too old to move about her cottage, José would be to her the comfort and support that her little

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Roderigo had often declared he would be. But her neighbor Juanita roused her from her dreams.

"*Buenas noches*, Fedora," she exclaimed. "Thinking out a pleasure for the King?"

"Thinking out a pleasure for the King! What do you mean by that, Juanita?"

"Oh, you haven't heard! Well, you know, I was down in the city to-day, and the whole place is in commotion. The King's herald is there, and he has proclaimed that any one who can bring the King any new pleasure will be rewarded with whatever he may desire."

Little José heard these words, and with beating heart sat up to drink them in. Oh, if he could only think of something! But Fedora banished his thoughts for the moment by her words.

"Far better if his Majesty," she said, "would attend to his people. New pleasures, is it! If he would take his sword in hand and drive the bandits from his kingdom, he would want none of your pleasures."

"Kings are only kings," said Juanita, wisely, "and they are too precious nowadays to expose themselves to the dangers of war. There was a time, it is true, when they did fight, and fight well, but that was in the barbarous days. At any rate," she continued rapidly, "all are vieing with each other to find something that will delight his kingship. Artists, musicians, poets, inventors of games

—every sort of genius, in fact—crowd the palace day and night, but no new thing can be found. I only wish I had brains,” she exclaimed; “I would”—and on her tongue rattled, naming many things she would do for the King’s happiness.

Little José took in every word, and in his heart longed to do something, think out some way of doing what others seemed unable to do. But what could he do? and his busy little brain kept asking himself this question till the morning light stole into the cottage, and, sleepless and tired, he arose at Fedora’s command.

Standing in the night air gossiping with Juanita had had a bad effect on Fedora. Her joints were so stiff that she was hardly able to rise from her bed; and José, eager to be kind to her, fell on his knees and said that if she would only try him once more he would be faithful. There was nothing else she could do, and with angry injunctions she threatened his very life if he failed in his trust. She even took down the fierce-looking weapon, with which she had faced the mountain band, to terrify the lad, and vowed to cut off his head if so much as a piece of wool were missing from one of the flock. José, after promising again and again to be faithful, was at last allowed to start out, pursued by her angry cries.

On he trudged towards the pasturage where he had spent two such unfortunate days, and ere he

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reached it he found that he was hardly able to drag himself along. It was the sleepless night that was telling on him. Oh! why had he listened to Juanita? This thought brought back to him the story of the King's wish, and while the sheep were browsing the juicy grass he was wandering in dreams over the world, seeking some new pleasure for the King. His head soon fell forward on his breast, and his little brain was filled with the splendours that the King had bestowed on him and Zora, nor did he cease his dreaming till the slow sun was beginning to creep to its rest behind the purple hills. When he did awake, not a sheep was to be seen, and with terrified thoughts and visions of the awful fate awaiting him from Fedora's sword he rushed madly from the place, not knowing where he went.

CHAPTER III

WITH a breaking heart, the unhappy lad ran frantically towards the dark forest that crowned the mountain summit. There were dangers there; but he did not fear them, nor did he even think of them; for the thought of his neglected duty and the awful dread of his mistress and her menacing weapon drove them from his mind. He would soon pass through the dark mass of tangled branches, and once on the other side of the hill he had no doubt but that the few members of his tribe who had been kept as slaves by their conquerors would give him a welcome. At any rate Zora was there, and he could tell her how careless he had been, and how he had longed to be back to play with her among the flowery dingles of their home.

With such thoughts he ran on till the border of the wood was reached, and then an icy dread crept over his heart. Fedora had warned him again and again that this wood was haunted by cruel wolves that lay in wait for sheep and boys; and although Fedora had somewhat magnified the danger, still José knew that wild beasts did live in the forest, and as he paused and looked into the black depths before him he seemed to see fierce, burning eyes staring greedily at him; and the sighing of the

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evening wind through the branches sounded to his terrified ears like angry, savage growls.

He looked back towards the valley and saw the green slopes gleaming in the rays of the setting sun, but as no sheep were browsing there the thought of his angry mistress gave him new courage, and he plunged into the shadows of the forest kings that rose in stalwart grandeur on every side.

He dared not look back: there seemed to be dread creatures following close at his heels, and even the twigs crackling under his feet sounded threateningly. On and on he rushed, and darker and denser grew the wood at every step, till he began to think that night was settling down about him. Oh! if he could only reach the summit, he thought, before darkness set in, he would perhaps be able to see where the tents of his people were pitched.

The thought of his old home gave him new energy, and with bleeding feet, with clothes torn by the sharp branches, with a heart beating with dread till he could hear its every throb, he darted forward like a young deer. But the pace was too much for his strength, and before long he fell over a broken branch and lay exhausted on the ground. He wished himself back with Fedora; the utter loneliness of the wood was more dreadful than her wrath, and he debated retracing his steps out of the forest, down the slope, and throwing himself for mercy at her feet.

Just then his ear was startled by a strange, weird sound, a sound that seemed to steal from a sun-lit world into the forest darkness and dispel its blackness. He rose to listen, and as he did so a sunbeam, seemingly laden with music, stole across his face and made him forget his pain. Again and again the music sounded, growing sweeter at each touch of the hidden musician's hand. José had heard many instruments, and he loved music, but no such sounds had ever fallen before on his ear. The music rang out stronger and clearer and every feeling except pleasure vanished. No thought of danger, no despair, no pain, no regret was in his heart. He rose to his feet, and like one entranced drank in the sweet strains. Sunbeams seemed to play about him, and one with many soft colors danced in his eyes. It appeared to beckon him onwards, and, without power to resist, he followed it through the woodland mazes. The music was about him, in his brain, in his heart, and ever as he went it grew stronger and more entralling, till he seemed to become a being of light and sweet sound instead of the José of flesh and blood whose young heart had been bleeding so painfully only a few moments ago. At last the whole world became a flood of light, and his dazzled eyes looked upon a more wonderful scene than had ever entered into his most fantastic dream.

The wood had come to an end, and before him

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was a dell of exquisite beauty. The broad green carpet seemed one glitter of diamonds and pearls. Every blade of grass had on it a separate gem. Flowers in rich profusion and of unearthly beauty were spread on all sides, and each blossom was adorned with a heart of gold. Fairyland birds in gorgeous plumage darted in and out among the surrounding bushes. The trees about this spot, too, had lost the rugged appearance of the forest ones, and on many branches mellow fruit glittered red and tempting before the eyes of the awe-struck boy. Over this whole scene the soft, exquisite music stole out dreamily on the evening air, as though playing the lullaby of the sun that was sinking beneath the western horizon.

At first José wondered where the music came from, for his eyes were so dazzled with the glorious light and undreamt of beauty that he did not think of looking for the musician. At length his glance fell upon a mossy bank embowered in a canopy of flowers, and there beheld a strangely picturesque figure. A little man with a flowing, snow-white beard reaching almost to his waist, and equally snow-white hair falling in great masses about his shoulders, sat and played the wondrous instrument. He was clothed in a coat of scarlet with gold and silver ornaments; his breeches were of rich purple material and his shoes were adorned with large gold buckles.

José's eyes rested but for a moment on the gorgeous apparel of the musician; the face soon held his riveted attention. Such a kindly face! Such an old young face! A face that might have begun with the world, and yet on it was the sunlit smile of a laughing child. José wished to rush forward and fall at his feet, but the music kept him spell-bound.

If the scene was strangely beautiful, if the little man seemed like some kindly sprite from the realm of dreams, the instrument that answered his touch was yet more wonderful. The frame of it seemed one mass of gold and the strings but darting sunbeams that lived beneath the supple fingers that ran rapidly across them. The sun was shining through the trees, and as its rays struck the golden glory José noticed that it was adorned in every part with gems that flashed forth all the colors of the rainbow. It was the light reflected from the instrument that cast such a glory over the grotto. It was this light that had drawn him from the despair of the dark woods to this place where every danger was forgotten.

Could he be dreaming? At the thought the music grew sweeter and stronger, and José could keep back no longer; slowly he advanced to the musician whose smile and kind eyes seemed to join with the music in drawing him onward. At last he reached the musician's very feet and with a

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childish impulse rested his head on the player's knee. The harper spoke no word, but played on, while José with burning heart drank in every sound. Slowly the sun sank, and the light in the wood grew dimmer and dimmer, and as it faded the music grew softer and softer till he could hardly hear it, and yet it penetrated to his very heart. He seemed to think the sun had something to do with the music, and with an impulsive cry he exclaimed, "O Sun, do not go down!" But the musician only smiled kindly upon him, as the sun sank behind the world.

The music ceased, and all the rich colors faded away from the landscape. The harp, too, had lost its beauty, and the birds that had been listening to its strains burst out into evening songs. But the face of the musician was the same; the sunken sun had not changed it. The same sweet smile lighted it, and the tender eyes, that were given a moment ago to the instrument, turned with loving sympathy to the little lad.

"Play! Play!" cried José, looking up with eager eyes into the kindly face.

"Far from it, my little man!" said the musician, his hand on the smooth young brow; "the harp must rest; it has done its work. But how is it that I find you in my home, where no man save myself has been for a thousand years?"

"A thousand years!" echoed José in surprise, as he looked wonderingly into the face of the musician.

"Yes, a thousand years! But come, my lad; tell me your story."

José's face burned with shame as he thought of his cowardly flight; but he was really a brave boy, and he courageously told how he had twice failed in his duty, and how in despair he had fled from his mistress. His voice failed him, and he burst into sobs.

"Ah, my truthful son, weep not! You were not to blame: 'twas I who put you to sleep. Yes, I was with you when you sat by the rock after your midday meal, and I made your thoughts wander on into the valley, down the river to the ocean; I was with you when with determination you faced the rugged mountain and struggled to drive away drowsiness, but I had my purpose, and lulled you to sleep. 'Twas I, too, who put it into the heart of the King to desire some new pleasure; and it was I who made you sleep that you might dream that you had found what delighted his heart."

It was a strange voice that was speaking, and as José saw that this man knew his past he clung piteously to his knees.

"But do not be afraid; you shall have your wish. It was for that I brought you here. You will bring the King his new wish and if you are only as faithful to me and my master, as you desired to be to Mother Fedora, there will be no greater name in the world than yours—no, not the King's!"

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José's heart bounded with delight at the words; he would have spoken, but the musician went on before he could give his thought utterance.

"This harp is the Sun's. It was created by men who adored the great body that rules the day, and the Sun-god gave it strange powers. I have been its priest for one thousand years. I have played it day by day in the flowery places of earth, but now the Sun commands that it go forth into the busy world—the world of active life, of human strifes and joys. You have been chosen to take it to the world, while I remain here to receive it back if you should ever regret your mission."

As he spoke, José reached out his hand to touch his treasure.

"No, no! Not yet! There are restrictions that go with it, and these you must hear before you can touch it. You see I am alone; there is no one with me, no one near, and I desire no one. Any one who touches this harp must renounce all human ties and be faithful to the harp alone. Can you do this?"

José was very young, and he had already had a desire to take the harp to Zora and show her the wonder he had found.

"Can you do this?" and there was a little severity in the tone of the speaker.

The wonderful music seemed all to rush back on him in a wild flood, and with the memory of it he

cried aloud: "Yes! I will love only the harp and the Sun."

"Well said! Well said! Now remember, no hand but yours must ever touch it. Some may try, but woe betide them if they do, without your permission; and you must never touch its strings unless the Sun is in the heavens. From sunrise till sunset you may play to your heart's content, but if you sound it after the Sun has set you will regret the day you were born. Now you can have your first acquaintance with your new friend; carry it, and follow me."

It was almost as tall as José, but when his eager hands touched it, it seemed as light as a feather, and with a heart burning with happiness he followed his guide to a cave hidden among the rocks of the neighboring cliff. He had now no fear of Fedora, no day-dreams to pain him with wishes that could never be realized. He was to become famous, to have a name greater than the King to whom all men bent the knee. Oh, if Zora only knew it!

His guide seemed to know his thoughts and turned on him with pitying eye while the harp suddenly became a burden in his hands. José realized the cause, and resolved to think only of the mission given him.

The cavern home of the musician was soon reached and a new round of surprises awaited the wondering boy. The walls were richly inlaid with

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precious stones. Swords and spears, battle-axes and shields, hung about on all sides. The owner, seeing the look of inquiry in the boy's eyes, explained the cause of this array.

"You wonder," he said, "why this warlike display is to be found in the home of a musician. Well, it has not always been peace with me. Long years ago a report spread abroad that my harp was in this part of the world, and knights and squires, kings and princes, came to take it from me; but none ever went back to tell that they had seen me. Yet I never lifted weapon against man. The harp can protect itself, and any who have offered it violence have left their weapons here as a mark of their rashness."

José wondered how it could be that a harp, seemingly as light as air, could have such power; but the world he had come into was a strange one, and he determined to wait patiently that he might know all.

"I am afraid," said his new friend, "by putting you to sleep to-day so early I have robbed you of your noonday meal, but you shall be recompensed. Lay the harp there," said he, pointing to a richly carved box, "and come to this little room where we will take some food."

The lad did as he was bidden, and found that the apartment within was adorned with ivory and gold and that the table was spread with the rarest fruits

and viands. The plates were gold, the heavier dishes silver, worked in forms of surpassing beauty, and each had on it a blazing sun. No one was about, yet everything seemed prepared for the monarch of the cave. He asked no questions, but to his inquiring looks the little man replied with a merry laugh: "Eat, my boy! To-morrow you will be in the same service and I will lie down here and rest till the world knows the value of the music of my instrument."

José ate more heartily than he had ever done in his life before, and when he had finished his meal his new friend bade him go to rest on a couch prepared in one corner of the cave. He slept a sound, sweet sleep; only one thought was in his young brain—the thought that he was to be greater than the King. The sunset music of the previous day played through his dreams and made his sleep as gentle as if he had never known pain or sorrow.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT sped swiftly by, and soon the dark shadow that covered the earth began to lift, and in its place a misty grey spread over the sky, over the mountain top, and over the forest. But this was only a forerunner to the full light of the morning, for soon this grey changed to purple, the purple to red, the red to golden, the gold of the dazzling sunshine; and the whole world began to awake.

With the first ray of sunlight the quaint little musician took his harp from its couch, and placing it between his knees began to caress it affectionately, as a father might a child he loved. Sweetly the instrument responded to his caresses and a morning song of joy burst forth triumphantly. It seemed to say: "Awake, awake! Light has come. Darkness has vanished. Awake! awake! The world is awake. Joy is spreading over the whole world."

The music grew in vigor, and as it increased José heaved a heavy sigh—not of weariness, but a sigh of one who had realized some long-desired pleasure. On hearing the sigh the musician rose from where he had been sitting and standing upright played a ringing air that banished sleep from José's eyes.

Slowly he rose, boy-like rubbed the last traces of sleep from his eyes, and recalled, as in a dream, the pain of the previous day and the joy of the evening. But this was only for a moment. The music had possession of him once more and he could think of nothing else. At last the closing chords were struck, and as the musician put the harp back on its couch he cried out: "Now, my little man, I see you are awake. Don't stand there in the cold. Put on your rags and we will have some breakfast."

José blushed for shame at the word rags, but hurriedly put them on. He did this with no little disappointment, for he had hoped that the good musician would bestow on him a suit such as he himself wore.

His new-found friend read his thoughts, and said: "Wait, my lad, and all will be yours. You go forth to-day, and the harp must provide you with everything. You will not be long in your suit of rags. The King himself will provide you with as royal a robe as ever young prince wore. But now that you are dressed we will have something to eat and then you must go out into the world once more. This time you will not have to go alone; you will have a helper and protector with you, but if you prove false and faithless a worse calamity than fear of Fedora's voice or Fedora's sword will befall you."

José shuddered at the thought of Fedora and her weapon, but the musician had once more taken up

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his instrument, and as he played a door in the end of the cave opened—or rather a rock swung back as if by magic, and unseen hands made ready a feast even more marvellous than the one he had enjoyed on the previous night. When the table was loaded with good things to eat the end of the cave swung into place once more, the music ceased, and the player turning to José, said: "Now eat a hearty meal; the next you get will have to be by your own skill."

The two sat down to the table and began their breakfast. At first José was a little timid, but his timidity soon passed away, and he was enjoying a meal such as he never had dreamed of tasting. The dishes were new to him, and he would have been at a loss to give them names, but this did not prevent his thinking he had never tasted anything so delicious. The old musician watched him with a kindly smile, and seemed to take pleasure in the boy's evident enjoyment. At the close of the meal he said: "Now, if your hunger is satisfied we will go into the beautiful sunshine. But take a good look at this room, remember everything you see, and talk to the harp when you are lonely about its old home: it will remember all, and will never fail to make you glad."

As he spoke he rose, and José rose too; a little reluctantly it is true, for on the table there was still

some fruit they had not eaten, and he had a boy's desire to leave nothing good behind him.

"Come, my lad," said his friend; "if you would conquer all things you must be devoted to one thing only. The Harp of the Sun must be from this day forth your only desire. You will find your freedom by being a slave to it, and you will find it no unpleasant master."

Without a word José followed the musician into the glorious morning. The earth was awake with joyful sound; the trees were bending and sighing under the light wind that swept up from the southern sea; the flowers waving in the sun or nestling in their beds of moss were still glistening with the dews of night; the wood, too, was alive with birds, and songs of love for mates, songs of thanksgiving that the dangers of the night were past, songs that told only the happiness the feathered songsters had in living, rose in continuous music on all sides.

José's eyes sparkled with delight, and he would have liked to throw himself down on the grass and listen through the whole day to this glad chorus. Ever since he had entered the cave he could not help thinking that, perhaps, it was all a dream; but this world that he had known from his boyhood, the birds that he had pointed out to Zora, the flowers that he had plucked to wind in a crown about her head when they played at king and queen, all

made him realize that he was the same boy who had left Zora in her mountain home, who had been sold to Mother Fedora for two sheep, who had had his name changed from Ismael to José, who had been beaten, and who had fled. But all the terror of the last few days had vanished from his mind.

The musician did not stop to listen to the sounds, or to drink in the sights, but went to the mossy mound where he had sat on the previous evening. When he reached it he sat down, took the silken mantle off the harp; and the strings, as they caught the sunlight, seemed to dance and vibrate in eagerness for their master's touch. But he did not touch them. He beckoned to José, who came to him, and stood waiting and expectant, eager to hear the music that had charmed away pain and sorrow after his neglected duty and flight. But the little man sat with head bowed down and made no effort to play his instrument. At length he rose, as if from a dream, and with sad eyes, and a face from which all the light, merry laughter seemed to have passed away, said: "Take my place, and play. It is yours: play."

José was amazed, and cried out, "I cannot play, O Master. I have never played on aught save a rude whistle shaped by my own hand. I cannot play. But teach me. I can learn."

The musician did not seem to hear him: "Take

my place," he said. "It is yours; my harp is yours! Take it, and play!"

José could do nothing but obey. He began to think that his kind host was mad, and tremblingly sat down among the flowers, and as he stretched forth his young arms to the instrument, he said: "What shall I play? I know only the rude songs that the robbers delight in."

"Play your thoughts," said the musician. "Fear not! The power to make the strings answer to your wish will be given to you."

But he was not reassured. When his fingers touched the strings he expected to see them snap beneath his touch, but instead they responded with a note of sweetness that filled the whole dell.

"Fear not!" cried the musician. "Play your thoughts! Give yourself up to the harp, and the music will come."

No second bidding was needed, now that the first note had given him confidence; and as he thought of the beauty of the world, the joy of being free, and the feeling that in his hands was an instrument that would make him famous, the strings seemed to answer to his thoughts, and the sunbeam-like chords danced and vibrated before his eyes, pealing forth music that seemed to flood the world. The trees stopped swaying, the flowers ceased nodding in the light morning wind, the birds refrained from

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singing, and all Nature breathlessly listened to the music of the enraptured boy-musician.

On and on he played, nor did he think of ceasing till his companion interrupted him with the words: "Now, you see, you are a master, too; master of the grandest instrument in the world; and you can only master it as long as you are master of yourself. Cover it with this silken mantle, and listen. I am sending you forth to give this music to the world; no matter what song may be desired of you, think, and it will come. Only remember three things are required of you: your life must be lived for truth and honesty; no evil must enter into it, or your hand will lose its cunning. While you have the harp in your possession no other affection must enter your life: love of gold, love of power, even family ties must never lure you away; and if you should ever covet money, power, or love, you must bring the harp back to me. I will be here to receive it. But the third condition is the one I would warn you against most earnestly. The harp is the Harp of the Sun. It must never be touched excepting when the Sun is in the heavens. You will be tempted: time and again powerful monarchs will desire you to play in the evening, their time of mirth; but refrain. Let them wait till the morning; you are the monarch in this; and if any of them should attempt to use force you will be protected. If you should break this last condition,

terrible will be the results. Do you promise to keep all these conditions? If you do, go! The world awaits your music."

"I do, I do," cried José, eagerly falling on his knees before his stern questioner. "Night and morning, morning and night, I will live for my instrument."

"Rise then, and take it; but before you go forth let me touch it once again. If you are faithful I may never see it more, but if you are untrue it will come back to me."

José rose from his knees, and the old musician seated himself, and seized the harp. As he removed its covering a thin, grey mist swept over the sky, and spreading across the sun cast a dull pale light over the earth. But the player did not look up. Silently, sorrowfully, he touched the chords, and the sad music sighed out on the morning air. The wood caught the strain and the trees and birds all seemed to join in the plaintive notes. It was a farewell, and the pangs that were in the heart of the musician found sympathy in the instrument. The birds had learned something of the music from the wondrous harp, and they were heavy at heart when they caught the notes of this song of leave-taking. Sadly the musician played, slowly the cloud crept across the sun, and just as the last grey shadow passed away from the wood, the music

ceased, and the musician's head fell forward lovingly against his instrument.

For a moment he remained thus, and José could not keep back the tears as he saw the sorrow his friend was enduring. But it was only for a moment. The head was soon raised, and with a firm voice the musician said: "Take it! It is yours! Go, now, and play from morning till evening whenever difficulties are in your way, and there is nothing that you will not be able to overcome. As for me, I go to yonder cave; there I will remain till you have either proved yourself, by your power to resist the evil of this world, worthy to take my place, or till you have broken your promises, and then the instrument will come back and remain with me till one worthy is found to take it from my hands."

With these words he moved slowly to the cave and left José standing wondering and alone before his treasure.

CHAPTER V

FOR a moment José remained dumbfounded. A sense of utter loneliness came over him as he stood in that beautiful dell, looking towards the cave for his kind old friend, who had disappeared from sight. He felt like rushing after him and begging him to come into the busy world too; but just as his feet were about to obey his thoughts he saw the rocks slowly moving across the entrance to the cave, and nothing was to be seen but a sheer wall of immovable granite.

Naturally he was awe-struck at the strange world he had unexpectedly dropped into; his heart rose within him, and there was a choking feeling about his throat that almost suffocated him. It was the feeling that he was without friends, and alone in the world; and he was about to throw himself down on the mossy bank, and weep in utter dejection, when his eyes fell on the instrument that was now his own.

He no longer felt lonely. Had he not been able to draw from its chords music that made him forget everything, and was it not his own now, his own for ever! He would not weep; he would play; and as he said this to himself he seized the golden,

jewel-crowned harp, and began to run his fingers over the strings.

He played a song of comfort, and as he played he seemed to get strength to endure anything. As he finished his song, the birds that had been hushed into silence burst into merry song, as if beseeching him to play on; but he could not, he had a mission before him. Into the world he must go; and drawing the silken covering over his harp, and laying it gently across his shoulders he began to walk towards the dark woods that must be passed before he could reach the world of men, the world that was henceforth to know the music that had for so many centuries been given to the flowers and the trees, the beasts and the birds.

His eager young feet soon reached the edge of the wood, and his eyes scanned the ground for a path, but there was none to be seen. How was he going to get through? It would not do to attempt to crush through the tangled bushes and over the fallen trees with his precious instrument, for the branches and thorns that had torn his clothes only the day before were still there and would snap the strings of his harp as if they were cobwebs.

His spirit fell within him at the difficulties he had to face; but the words of the musician came to him: "Play the harp when in trouble, it will never fail you," so he took it from his shoulder, held it before him, and played an appeal to the wood spirits to

open up a way for him; and, as he played, a path seemed to be disclosed at his very feet. The harp, too, became as light as thistle-down, and moved before him as if sustained by unseen hands. As he played he advanced through the branches that parted and lifted in his path. He looked not down, he looked not up; he looked not to the right or to the left, but played and followed where his instrument led.

Suddenly he seemed to feel a trembling under his fingers. He cast his eyes along the path, and there in the very heart of the wood and right before him lay a great wolf ready to spring upon him. His first thought was that it was the wolf that Fedora had told him about, the wolf that lay in wait to devour sheep and boys. He began to tremble as he looked at the giant beast lying there, with blazing eyes that seemed already to be devouring him. Its fierce red tongue lolled savagely from its black mouth, and as it gazed at him low growls came from its bristling throat.

His knees knocked together, his heart failed him, and his hands fell lifeless at his sides. As the music ceased, the wolf rose slowly, and advanced towards him growling savagely, showing the white fangs by which he felt in a moment he would be torn to pieces. It was too late to flee, and José was about to close his eyes and surrender his life to his fierce

enemy, when the words, "It will never fail you!" seemed to blaze before him.

Just as quickly as his courage had ebbed, it now returned; his young arms grew strong, his eye grew bright, and his cheek flushed. With an impulsive hand he sent a note of defiance ringing from the chords. The wolf hesitated a moment, but only for a moment; once more it advanced, and as it drew near José clanged his defiance from his instrument, nor did he cease, though he felt the hot, angry breath almost in his face. Something told him he would not be harmed, and even when the wolf rose to spring upon him he sent forth his most confident outburst.

The wolf rose to spring, but instead of falling upon José he fell upon his back as if he had received a tremendous blow. His bones crashed together under the force of his fall, and when he regained his feet, with a terrified howl of pain he limped away, crestfallen, into the dark shadows of the wood.

José began to realize what a power he had in his hands. A great difficulty and a great danger had been surmounted simply by playing on his harp. If it could make a path through the woods, and conquer a beast that had been the terror of the forest, what could it not do? Already he began to feel that, as the musician had said, he would be greater than the King himself. This thought gave him new vigor, and with quickened step he followed

his instrument's guiding notes, never looking back; having no dread of the wolf or the shadows. Soon the trees began to grow thinner, the shadows were less dark, and the tall monarchs of the forest gave place to trees of lesser growth. In a few moments he felt a full warm gleam of sunlight on his cheek that told him he had reached the open. He ceased playing, and sat down—not to rest, but to wonder.

There was the fair world spread out before him; the distant city, the distant stream, and the waving fields of grain. Only the night before he had rushed into the woods, his little feet had been torn by the brambles, his clothes had been rent, and his body bruised. To-day he had come through the same woods barefooted, and yet he had suffered in no way. Could it all be only a dream? No! There was the city before him, the river, the orchards, the fields; and far, far away, on a distant hill, he could see the strong palace of the King—the King who desired some new pleasure. He had it for him, and at the thought he seized his instrument and began rapidly to descend the steep hillside.

Down and down he went with his protector clasped lovingly in his arms, until he reached the spot where he had made such efforts to keep Fedora's flock from straying away. He expected to see the flock nibbling the grass among the hills, and he had a dread of meeting Fedora. He looked

far and near, but no sheep could be seen. He sat down sadly at the base of the very rock where sleep had overpowered him only the day before, and in the blazing sun began to lament on his harp the pain he had caused the poor, cross old woman, who had, for all her crossness, been very kind to him. Sorrowfully he played with closed eyes, and the sweet music stole over the mountain side. As he played, two sheep rushed bleating towards him, but he did not hear them, nor did he open his eyes until his strain was finished; and when he did, on either side of him stood one of Fedora's very best and snowiest sheep. "The flock," he thought, "has strayed away and these are all that are left, but I will bring the others to me;" and he played with might and main, but no more sheep obeyed his call.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "these two are all that have been lost. The rest have returned to the fold, and Fedora had been unable to take them to their pasture. I can at least return these to her."

With a feeling of dread—for he still, even with his protector in his arms, dreaded the angry tongue and menacing weapon of his old mistress—he wended his way down towards her cottage. It was his duty. Perhaps his harp might be able to charm even her anger away.

Soon the cottage was before him, and with trembling step he advanced towards the open door. As he passed the sheep-fold, he saw that the sheep

were all there, and the two that had followed him rushed eagerly to the gate of the fold, anxious to join their comrades. But José did not stop to let them in; fearfully he went to the door. But Fedora was not moving about in the cottage, and to his sorrow he found her on her bed tossing and groaning with aching bones.

Fedora turned towards him, and when she saw him in the doorway, she rose on her couch, and shaking her fist at him, cried; "It's you, you thief, is it? Oh, if I could only get up, wouldn't I cut you into mincemeat? Bring me that sword, you thief, till I kill you."

But José was not anxious to be killed, so he made no effort to comply with Mother Fedora's request. He was, however, very sorry for the poor old woman, and said earnestly, "Forgive me, my good, kind mistress! I did not mean to do wrong, but I could not keep awake, and so I ran away."

"You could not keep awake! Wait till I am strong enough, and I will teach you to keep your lazy eyes open. Here have I been for the last twenty-four hours waited on by Juanita, who delights in telling me that I am old and weak, and that I will soon have to leave my flock and little cottage and garden in her keeping. Old, am I? I'll teach you, you gipsy thief, that I am young enough to make every bone in your body ache. My flock would have stayed out all night but for

Juanita; she tended them, and two of my best sheep have been stolen. I suppose you have taken them to your rascally tribe."

José, who had been struggling to get in a word to explain that he had brought the sheep back, at last sat down in despair and ran his fingers over his harp, playing the same air that had drawn the sheep to him on the hillside. Scarcely had he begun to play when a hurried patter of feet was heard on the hard ground in front of the cottage, and in an instant the two stray ones bounded in to his side.

Mother Fedora, at the sound of the music, ceased shouting out her woes about Juanita's taunts, José's wickedness, her own aches, and her lost sheep, and sat up in open-mouthed wonder. And when her lost sheep pattered in she uttered a cry of delight and fell back exhausted and dazed.

José ceased playing and said: "Here, my mistress, are your sheep; I brought them from the mountain-side. I will come back some time and repay you what you have paid for me, and the trouble I have given you."

"You'll come back?" cried Fedora. "You'll not get out of my sight again."

As she attempted to rise, she found she had not sufficient strength, and fell back with a cry of pain.

"I am very sorry," said José, "to have to leave you; but I have been given a duty to do, and I must

go into the world until I meet the King. I have been sent to him."

"Sent to the King, you lunatic!" exclaimed Fedora; "you have been sent to watch my flock, and if you leave this cottage I will hunt all over the kingdom for you and chop off your head. You sent to the King! Where did you steal that instrument, you young thief—and where did you learn to play it?" she added, in a milder tone.

"I did not steal it; it was given to me, and I have been commanded to give its music to the King. But I cannot leave you suffering as you are, and yet I must go on."

"Oh! you ungrateful boy," moaned the poor woman; "would you leave me to die of starvation, perhaps; for Juanita has barely enough to support her own miserable life? Your harp is a rich one; take it to the city and sell it, and come back to live with me. I promise never to beat you again."

"Sell my harp! I cannot, I cannot!" cried José. "It is a magic harp. No one taught me to play it: I need only touch its strings, and whatever I wish will come. It led me through the forest, and made a wolf rush back to his den when he was in the very act of springing upon me."

"It will give you whatever you wish?" interrupted Fedora. "Then, wish that I be made young and strong again: wish that these wrinkles leave my old face, that my arms become once more fit

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for my work, that my bones leave off aching. Do this, and I will not envy the King his castles and his servants."

"I will wish it," said José, and he took the harp and played. As he played, the warm, healthful blood began to course through Fedora's veins; her yellow, shrunken, shrivelled cheeks grew full and young and rosy; her arms, worn with toil, became round and strong, and her bones ceased aching. She rose from her couch as if she had never known a pain, and stood dazed and stunned from very joy, feeling and looking as young as she had been thirty years before.

She was about to rush upon the harp and embrace it, but José cried out: "No! No! You must not touch it; it will kill you."

"Kill me!" cried Fedora, derisively. "I could break it into a thousand pieces with these arms," and she looked admiringly at the muscles that had so suddenly returned to her.

"No, you could not," replied José. "I saw it dash a wolf from it as though he were a feather. Remember, it bestowed that strength on you, and it can take it from you in an instant. But the day passes, and I must hurry on."

"Not till you have something to eat. It is high noon already, and it will be evening before you reach the city. Wait, and I'll get you a meal fit for a prince."

As she spoke, she bustled about with a youthful activity that made José look with wonder on the instrument that had such marvellous power. But he was still José, and quite a human boy, and at the sight of the home-made wine, and the grapes, and the black bread, his mouth watered and his eyes danced quite as hungrily as they had done before the golden and the silver dishes in the woodland cave.

He was soon eating heartily, and as he ate Fedora drew from him all that had passed since he left her, and she was often compelled by the strangeness of the tale to doubt his words; but the new youth she had received, the fresh strength and activity, reassured her, and she believed it all. But she was loath to let him leave her, and when the meal was done she begged him to stay, and not attempt to find the King, who, she said, had enough pleasures already; and promised him that he would have nothing to do but sit in the sun and play to his heart's content.

But no pleading could change his purpose, and he got ready to depart. Fedora, however, was filled with a desire to have the magic harp in her hands; but José snatched his instrument up, and cried out, "Do not touch it." Fedora laughingly put out her hands to seize it. He knew the harp could defend itself, but to save her he rushed from the hut and ran with the wings of the wind towards

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the city. She rushed after him, but he was soon a mere speck on the road, and she gave up the chase.

She then went to Juanita's cottage; and poor Juanita, bent and shivering with age, could hardly believe it was Fedora; and when her neighbor told her that José had become an angel, and was going about playing a harp that could lead home the flocks, make paths through the woods, send wolves howling to their lairs, and renew youth to people who were on the verge of the grave, Juanita rushed from her cottage to beg him to restore her youth. But he was nowhere to be seen, and she hobbled back, feeling many years older, now that Fedora had become young again; and Fedora joyously went back to her cottage and her toil, never again to dread Juanita's taunts about her age.

CHAPTER VI

JOSÉ never looked back, but hurried on to the city whose walls gleamed before him white and beautiful. The sun was slowly sinking in the West, and he was afraid that it would be behind the hills before he could get into the city, and the thought that his harp could only answer his touch while the sun was in the heavens made him hurry along at a breakneck pace. What would he do for a place of rest and an evening meal if he should be unable to make his harp provide them for him? Slowly the sun sank, and rapidly he neared the city, with its great domes glittering in the golden light and the gleaming spires towering in grandeur high above the walls. The sight made his heart glad. In a few moments he would be in that city, where all people would delight in his music; and all, even the King, would do him honor. He was almost at the walls now, and as they loomed up high and strong before him he saw at intervals little watch-towers, where soldiers clad in glittering armor stood keeping a careful guard. He looked about him for a gate, and there, a little to his right, he saw two towers, higher and stronger than the others, and connected by a bridge over which two guards paced to and fro. This, he felt, must be the city's

chief entrance, and to this place he hurried. There, sure enough, was an opening, but, just as he was about to enter, the great thick gates moved slowly outward, and with a shrieking of bolts, a groaning of hinges, and a clattering of chains, they closed and shut out the city. He rushed against them in his eagerness to enter, but they moved not, and his little hands pushed in vain.

"Hello! my gipsy," cried a burly soldier, leaning over the guard-bridge, "so you are going to break into our city! We have enough of your miserable tribe within our walls already; you can sleep out on the plains for to-night. Know you not that it is due to you sneaking rascals that our good King compels us to shut the gate an hour before sundown? Under cover of gathering darkness your beggarly people, with their lame legs, their starved looks, their squeaking pipes and squalling stringed instruments, have kept crowding in, to beg and lie and steal, till every corner of the city is full of them. If I had my will I would string you up by the score on every tower as a warning to your friends to keep to their own side of the hills."

But José heeded not his angry voice and cried out the more vehemently, "Let me in! I must get in!"

"You must, eh?" cried the soldier with a gruff laugh. "We'll see about that. What is that you have on your back under that covering? A musical instrument, I should say, from its shape.

So you hope to get in to add your racket to the din that makes us wish our ears were stuffed with wool from morn till night. Listen, you monkey-faced brat, and hear what your countrymen are doing!"

He stopped speaking, and José heard harsh, jarring notes: the pipe, the harp, the flute, all vieing with each other, each evidently eager to drown the other rather than to produce music. Mingled with this music, or rather noise, he could hear the clatter of hurrying feet across the stones of the city, the shouts of the mule-drivers as they forced their laden beasts through the crowded streets, the murmur of voices in conversation, and the cries of merchants calling their wares. All these sounded clear and distinct to his ear, and yet he could not enter.

His thoughts were rudely interrupted by the harsh voice over his head: "So you wish to join your strength to all that din? The blessed saints will thank me for what I am about to do."

As the guardsman spoke he took his great bow in his strong hands, and drawing an arrow from his quiver placed it on the string.

"No, no!" he cried laughing, "you need not turn pale and shudder for your life. The arrow of Lara, the King's chief guardsman, would turn upon himself before it would enter a gipsy brat. No, no! I'm merely going to save my fellow-citizens from

many days' annoyance by snapping the strings of your instrument."

He then raised his weapon, glanced his eye along it, taking steady aim so that his arrow in its course should not merely crash through the strings, but should break them all as it tore across them. A moment he paused, laughing at the lad's terror, and then sent the arrow with unerring aim on its path of destruction. It whizzed with angry swish through the air, and before José could move, it struck the covering of the harp. But that arrow, that in Lara's hands had often pierced triple mail, made no dint on the harp. It struck the silken mantle and fell to the ground, shattered into a thousand pieces.

Nor was this the only thing that happened. As the arrow struck the harp the bow in the archer's hands snapped into splinters and the string burst with a piercing cry. The archer, too, was hurled to the ground, as though struck by some giant hand. His comrade in the opposite tower rushed across the bridge and raising him gently poured some wine between his lips, and slowly he opened his eyes.

"It is an angel or the devil," he cried, "at the gates. Keep them shut! If the very devil is there we must keep him out. Be on your guard, Haro!"

José, as the arrow fell at his feet, tore the covering from his harp to see if the blow had damaged it in

any way, but it was still shining beautiful and undinted, the jewels still glittered in all their brilliancy, and the strings still quivered like sunbeams eager to respond to the lightest touch. The desire to play came to him, and notwithstanding the presence of the stern soldiers his hand swept across the strings.

At the first touch Lara forgot his bruises and with Haro leaned over the bridge to listen. José saw them and cried out once more in childish appeal, "Open!" They could not resist, and forgetting their duty they were about to take hold of the levers that controlled the gates, when suddenly the dull, heavy groaning of the bolts, the clatter of falling bars, the ringing of dropping chains, warned them that the gates were being opened by unseen hands.

Awe-struck, they stood open-mouthed, while the ponderous gates swung inwards, and the city lay open to José. With delight he hurried through, fearing that the gates might close before he could get inside, and as he advanced he played a stirring song of triumph.

"Humph!" cried Haro, "scratch my leg with your dagger, Lara, for, by my life, methinks we dream. I trust no one saw the gates open; if they did we will be given to the crows in the morning. There, they clang to again and no alarm has been sounded, thank Heavens!"

"It's no dream, Haro. There is my bow broken

into splinters and here is my hand torn where the string burst. And see, my helmet is dented where I struck the corner of the tower. Lucky I had it on, or I am afraid my head would have been cracked like an egg-shell. But where is our musician? Lost in the crowd; he still plays on, however, and would he were always in the city: every pipe, every screeching merchant, every beggar, has stopped his clatter and listens with open mouth. I wish I could get out of this. I believe I would follow him about the streets as I did the pipers when I was a lad. By Our Lady, when the King is gracious enough to give me my pay, instead of buying a gold chain to hang about my neck, I will lay it all at the shrine of our musician, for an angel or saint he is."

"Beware, Lara," said Haro; "you may be doing reverence to the devil."

"Out with you, Haro! Think'st thou that Satan ever heard such music? If he did methinks he would discard his horns and hoofs, give over his stubbornness, and once more become an angel. Had he been an angel of darkness he would never have been content with breaking my bow and string, and cracking my helmet; he would have dashed me to pieces. He is an angel of light, and, though I do not know his name, my unknown saint will be only second in my reverence to Our Lady. But listen to the music; it is slowly reaching the market

place. I only wish I could spirit myself away from this tower."

As he spoke, José was passing along the streets, playing as he went. When he had passed the gates, the street musicians and beggars, who had not caught the full richness of his music in the discord and din they were making, at first thought it merely some more skilful musician come among them, and dreading lest the scant harvest of coins would go his way they began to shout and pipe with their utmost energy. But José's harp rang out above them all, and one after the other, as they caught his music, paused and stood spell-bound. Their eyes, too, greedily viewed the rich frame that held the magic chords, but no one thought of that for more than a moment. The music seized them and held them in rapt attention. Along the street he passed, and the crowd, forgetting their occupations, and leaving their wares behind them at their stands, and their shops unguarded, followed after him, crowding, jostling, tramping on each other, everyone eager to hear the music, to see the player and his magic harp. No sound was heard except his notes and the shuffling of feet, as men, women, children, beggars, tradesmen, street-musicians, and jugglers madly hurried along after the player.

At length the great square was reached, the square where once a year the King assembled the citizens while his heralds proclaimed in voices of

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thunder the new laws he had in his wisdom enacted, and the dire calamities that would befall any one daring to break his decrees. The sun was shining with level beams right into the square, its light falling full upon a broad white marble stone, pure as new-fallen snow, that lay in the very centre of the square. It was the King's Stone; the place where the King, clad in a robe of dazzling whiteness, with a golden crown on his head, golden shoes on his feet, was wont to take his stand, while the people knelt with their heads in the dust to hear his sacred commands. No foot save the King's ever stood upon it, and the penalty for trespassing on this sacred stone was death.

José knew not this; he had never seen the place before, and he was following where the harp led. Right across the square he went, nor did he stop till his bare, brown feet stood on the very centre of the King's Stone. The crowd uttered no cry of horror; under the spell of the music they had not realized the desecration. José seemed to have become transfigured there; in the full rose-tinted sunlight, his bare feet, his ragged dress, his uncovered head, and dark gipsy face were not seen. The harp was everything, and the whole square seemed filled with ten thousand rainbows, for about him was cast a celestial glory from the harp and the sun. Awe seized the beholders; a feeling that they were in the presence of some being more

sacred than the King himself took possession of them; and all about him, men, women, and children, lords, ladies, and beggars, fell on their knees and hid their faces. José did not heed their obeisance; he knew only one thing, that his fingers were making the same music that had drawn him to the woodland musician. The sun as it sank seemed to compel him to play it to rest, as it had urged the master in the wood, and José, feeling that he must soon cover up his instrument for the night, played with an eager enthusiasm that held the crowd breathless.

While this scene was being enacted in the broad square, the Governor of the city was galloping furiously towards it on his snow-white charger. He had been in the tower of his mansion looking out towards the purpling hills, when his eye fell upon a crowd gathering about the great gates of the city. As he gazed the crowd grew larger and larger, and streamed on towards the centre of the city, as if following some leader. He heard no shouts, and the very silence filled him with misgivings. Could it be possible, he thought, that the mountain tribes, who had lately fled for refuge to his city, and had been fed and clothed and housed at the good King's command, had risen in arms and were attempting to organize an insurrection? He was no coward. He would see for himself, and rushing down from his tower he ordered his servants to saddle his horse and bring him his sword in its golden scabbard,

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that scabbard that only a governor could wear. In a few minutes he was on his richly caparisoned steed, spurring with fiery haste on his errand. Nor did he slacken his pace until he reached the King's Square, where, to his amazement, he saw the ground black with prostrate figures.

The thought flashed through his mind: Could the King have come to the city without his knowledge, and was that he who was standing like a golden glory on the sacred stone? But as he strained his eyes he saw a ragged musician playing a harp. From where he sat on his horse he could not hear the music, and with a furious cry at the sacrilegious deed he drew his sword from the scabbard, and putting spurs to his steed rushed at a wild gallop over the kneeling crowd. Like a flash he was within ten feet of José. He had raised his sword aloft for a deadly blow, when suddenly his horse stood still, his sword dropped to his side, and man and beast were bound in the same spell that held the vast crowd.

José seemed not to have noticed the mad rush of the charger, or the danger that had threatened him; but on he played, with eager hands and swelling heart, as the sun sank behind the hills. Slowly, slowly it sank, and as it drew nearer the horizon the music grew gentler and sweeter; and when at last only a faint circle of light shone above the grey

of the hills, the music died out in an exquisite note that seemed to bid the sun good-night.

Scarcely had the last chord died away when the Governor snatched from his girdle his golden sheath, and threw it as a gift at the musician's feet. The crowd followed his example; ladies took from their ears, their necks, their wrists, their ankles, rich jewels and cast them recklessly on the white stone; men threw their gold, their silver; and children and beggars, who had begged or piped all day for a few coppers, cast the store that was to have bought them their supper and bed into a pile that rose up to José's very knees.

The crowd, beside themselves, cried, "Play! Play!"

But José had drawn his mantle over his instrument, and said in a firm voice, "Not to-night; to-morrow I will play to you again."

But the crowd would not heed. "Play! Play!" they cried; and as he firmly refused, some of the evil-minded exclaimed, "Let us take his harp and play it ourselves."

Others, eyeing the treasures on the ground, shouted: "Tear him to pieces! Has he not defiled the sacred stone with his naked feet?"

But the Governor firmly interposed in his commanding voice: "Let no man interfere with the boy! If he has been guilty of sacrilege we are all guilty with him, as we all did him reverence while

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he stood on the stone. The King alone can judge him, and the King shall know of his deed in the morning."

But the jealous musicians in the crowd cried out: "Tear him to pieces! The King will pardon us for taking the law in our own hands."

It seemed as though José's life was in great peril, when the tramp of armed men sounded across the square, and a line of soldiers, in complete armour, with Lara and Haro at their head, advanced towards the stone. It was the guard from the walls who had been relieved at sundown. When the Governor saw them he cried: "Soldiers, halt! Protect this lad till he is safe in my castle."

"Protect him!" cried Lara. "Protect us from him, rather; he is able to take care of himself. I interfered with him at the gates, and got a cracked pate for my trouble."

The crowd fell back in fear at the soldier's words, while the Governor said: "Collect this money and these jewels. Do not leave out my scabbard! all are the boy's! He has been guilty of a fearful crime. He has stood where never man, save a king, has stood before, and his life is in the King's hands. This night, however, he shall sleep free and protected under my roof. You will see to this, Lara?"

"See to this! I have just sworn to give my pay as an offering to this musician, and now I

further vow that my sword, with the King's permission, will be used in no other service."

The crowd parted, and José, with his harp across his young shoulders, followed the Governor to his palace, surrounded by trusty soldiers, who reeled under the weight of money and jewels that his playing had won from the crowd.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the royal square the crowd surged, led by the Governor on his gorgeously caparisoned white steed. José followed closely behind in strange uncertainty. He had, as it were, come out of a dream, and the noble-looking soldier, that magnificent charger, the dense crowd, were seemingly but the memory of it. While the sun was above the horizon he had not noticed the people about him, but now the multitude of crowding, wondering faces made him shrink back into himself. He had known but few people; brought up in a wandering gipsy tribe, his knowledge of humanity was limited to a score or two of half-starved vagabonds; but this sea of human beings pressing about him made him marvel at the vastness of the world.

It was surely all a dream! Could he still be asleep on the mountain side among his straying flock? He looked himself down and up. Yes, surely he was José! These were his rags; there on his bare, brown, dusty feet was a scar he had received several days before while climbing up a difficult tree with boyish curiosity to see if the eggs in a scarlet-winged bird's nest were the color of the bird. And this line of fully-armed soldiers to his right and to his left keeping back the crowd!

What could such an imperial guard mean? He looked again at his rags and his scar; and again at the splendidly-mounted figure before him, the silent, wondering crowd pressing close to him, and the stalwart soldiers towering high above the ordinary citizens, moving with slow and steady tramp by his side. Yes, he was José! But all this was surely a dream.

Then he remembered the strange, weird, kindly little dwarf in the woods; the sunset music he had heard, Fedora and her sheep. He was still clad as her shepherd, but now, in his rags, instead of guarding a few troublesome sheep, he was honored by a man like unto a king, a whole city had been at his feet, and what seemed to him a whole army, such as might guard a king, protected him and his harp. He looked at his instrument. It was still on his arm, but now that the sun had set it had lost its glory. The sheen had departed from the silken covering, and it seemed naught but a rude street instrument concealed by a ruder piece of cloth—and he could but wonder and wonder.

Over the crowd, too, was sweeping a change of feeling. Many of them had cast at the feet of the musician precious trinkets; misers had parted with some of their greedy gains, and even the beggars had let fall the price of their suppers. Their wonder was vanishing and in its place hatred was rising.

"What is he, after all," they murmured, "but a

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ragged beggar, more unkempt than any of the musicians of our streets!"

"He is in league with the devil," hissed others, "and has deceived us by the aid of the Prince of Evil."

"Let us fall upon him and tear him to pieces," was whispered on all sides.

But the soldiers with their drawn swords kept them back, and the stern, grim smile of Lara frightened them into subjection. There were some among the soldiers, however, who had not come under the influence of the magic of the music, and sympathy with the crowd grew in their hearts.

"What folly we take part in!" thought they. "The King's Guard to perform such a foolish task, such a degrading task, as to escort a beggar through the streets as though he were a prince."

They, too, were not accustomed to being employed as beasts of burden, and several of them groaned under the weight of the treasure that had been heaped upon this beggar. One of the boldest of them jostled rudely against the lad, but scarcely had he touched the harp before he was sent sprawling into the midst of the crowd.

Lara had seen the act and had drawn his sword to strike the rude guardsman with the flat of it, but instead he laughed loudly when he saw him rolling in the dust.

"Dost like thy bed, Charles?" he shouted. "Dost

like thy bed? Up, man, and sleep not by the way."

"'Tis the devil! 'tis the devil!" the crowd began to shout, and there was a surging and a pressing that boded ill for José. Even the stern Governor's voice was unable to command order. But although those on the outskirts of the crowd turbulently pressed forward, those nearest José, who now trembled timidly at the uproar he had created, had no wish to approach nearer the mysterious lad and his more mysterious instrument, and as a consequence the central portion of the crowd was sadly squeezed and crushed and even trampled on. At length a coward stumbled over a loose paving stone, and seizing it, hurled it at José.

It struck with a dull thud, but not against either José or his harp. It reached the harp it is true, but scarcely had it touched the instrument before it went whizzing back straight as an arrow from the bow and laid the thrower prostrate and unconscious.

This was too much for the mob. Hastily they fell back, and a wide space was made between the soldiers and the crowd, who were hushed into silence by their superstitious dread of the strange beggar who had power such as no man ever before wielded. There was now no murmur from the soldiers; they scarcely dared turn their glance toward the harp lest it should blast their sight. Slowly they advanced through the city, uncertain

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whether to be glad of the honor that was done them in being the escort to such a miraculous being, or to lament that they, the first soldiers in the kingdom, should be the menials of a ragged gipsy minstrel. Two alone were sure of themselves; the Governor, in whose heart the music was still working, and Lara, who had vowed to serve this minstrel before even his King, and who never broke his word.

But all rejoiced when the splendid palace of the Governor loomed up in the distance—the Governor and Lara because they had nothing further to fear from the crowd; the soldiers, because to some of the prouder their present task was humiliating, while others felt that if they were not escorting the devil himself in disguise they had with them one of his lesser imps; and José, who, despite the music he had made, the wealth that had fallen at his feet, the power the harp gave him, was still only a boy and very hungry.

They were soon before the magnificent residence where the Governor lived in state, and at the thundering voice of Lara the escort drew up in two long lines, while the Governor dismounted and giving his horse to a groom passed through the midst of the soldiers with drawn swords. José followed, trembling at the sight of the fierce, big men with their fierce, long weapons; but had he only known it, under their armour their knees were

knocking together from very fear of him. Up the marble steps they passed, and between the two black marble lions that guarded the golden doors, and into the palace of the man second only to the King in wisdom, in wealth, and, best of all, in kindness of heart. The servants in their gorgeous livery bowed low when the Governor and José entered the hall. They no doubt wondered at the strange little gipsy that followed their master, but they were too well trained to show their wonder even by a look. What their master did was right; it was for them to obey. Two of them, as was their custom, followed reverently behind the Governor; while two others went without and stood one on either side of the golden doors by the black lions, to see that no man entered; for even in those days a ruler's life was ever in danger. But they had nothing to fear. The Governor's servants had taken charge of José's wealth, and Lara was already marching his soldiers back to their quarters. The crowd, too, had dispersed grumblingly, threatening death and destruction to the Governor and his palace. Nor did they rest satisfied with their threats alone; the King was expected in the city on the following day, and several shrewd ones who were jealous of the Governor rushed off to tell him of the pollution of the sacred stone before the Governor could send him an explanation of the strange occurrence.

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Once within the palace José was led along a hall fairer than he had, even in his wildest dreams, imagined the King to possess. The floor was of colored mosaic; the walls were adorned with paintings of wondrous hues, and so skilfully were they done that at first he thought that the pictured men and women were living figures; the roof, too, was richly painted, and he wondered by what miracle the artist could ever have remained suspended in mid-air while he covered the dome with those fair angel faces that peeped out from clouds and peered from among the glittering stars. Here and there were marble statues so lifelike in appearance that he quite expected them to step from their pedestals and follow the owner of all this wealth and beauty.

Just as they reached the centre of the hall, a door burst open and two fairylike little children bounded out with cries of joy, and rushing to their father, seized him by the hand, welcoming him home. At first they did not seem to notice José, but their little round eyes opened with wonder when at last they beheld this ragged, barefoot lad. They had been carefully kept from scenes of poverty, sin, and distress; and such a boy as José they had never before beheld. He was a great curiosity for them, and after their first wonder was spent they rushed eagerly upon him. Their father, remembering the miracles of the harp, would fain

have stopped them, but he was too late and to his horror he saw them seize José and his harp, but no ill results followed. He was wise, and with quick mind divined the cause; only those with evil intent suffered; the harp would do no harm to the good, the innocent, the pure.

When their mother saw them trip gaily into her presence with the barefooted, ragged, unkempt street-player who carried lightly on his shoulder a rude instrument, she was horrified at the sight. Her husband, who, now that he was in the midst of his own family, had lost some of his austere dignity of manner, saw her surprised look and laughingly told how he had found the lad.

"But why do you not have him properly clothed?" said the mother, who had not come under the spell of his music or seen the miracles wrought by his harp. "My little ones are covered with dust from his tattered rags."

"All in good time; we have but left the street; but you can have the servants attend to him now."

Quickly she ordered that José should receive a bath—at which José shuddered, for being an inland lad he was not familiar with water, but when she ordered that new apparel should be given him, and that his rags should straightway be burned, he cried out against it.

"Nay, nay! he who gave me the harp bade me seek the King and he would clothe me."

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No persuasion could change him; he maintained that from the King alone he would accept new raiment. But his benefactor had said nothing about baths or doubtless he would have insisted that he would wait till it was the King's good pleasure to give him one, so he consented to undergo that ordeal. But his harp went with him; he would not leave it out of his sight for a moment. However, when he reached the great room where the sparkling water played in showers of liquid coolness and the baths lay deep and cool and tempting he could not be persuaded to discard his rags; he dreaded a plot to steal them from him, and so at last the patient servant allowed him to wash in his own way: and a rude way it was. Under the water he ducked his dusty head, rubbed his little black hands over his shining face, shook himself and stood up washed. It fared better with his feet, however. They were sore and hot and tired with his long tramp and the delicious coolness of the water made it pleasant to the touch, and he paddled and paddled till he was clean and refreshed. Back to the Governor he was led, still bearing his harp, and his hungry eyes sparkled with pleasure when he saw the rich meal that had been made ready.

In the meantime the Governor and his wife had had a difference of opinion as to how he should be treated. The mother felt that such an urchin

could never sit at their table. Apart from the effect he would have on their little ones, the servants would be loath to wait on him; but the Governor, usually ready to give way to his wife in such affairs, was firm.

"He came to us," he said, "with power such as no man ever possessed. The crowd fell before him as though he were a prince, and as a prince he shall be treated till the King decides. Methinks," he added with a laugh, "it would be well to make him Governor of this city. When the King demanded revenue all he would have to do would be to harp and it would fall at his feet. I know not what may befall me or him to-morrow; but a strange miracle was worked through him to-day, and such powers cannot be for naught. In the sunset he seemed more than human; he seemed like an angel of light, and as a princely visitor we shall treat him, and at our table he shall sit till the King decrees otherwise."

So José found himself in a richly-carved and ornamented seat at a great shining table laden with rich dishes, and, what he appreciated more, tempting food. Scarcely had they begun their meal when a tall youth with pale, finely-cut face and luminous eyes entered.

"Why so late, Henry?" said the Governor, looking up at his son.

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"I stayed in the city inquiring about the lad who moved us all so mysteriously."

"Heard you him?"

"Yes!"

"Did'st ever hear such music?"

"No!"

"Where," exclaimed his mother, "is your clasp? 'Twas at your girdle when you went out."

The lad blushed crimson; then with a quickness of wit that pleased the Governor mightily, he replied: "Ask father where is his golden scabbard."

"Well said, son! Thy mother's gift went with the King's gift. I blame thee not. Methinks I would have thrown the keys of the city had it come into my head so to do. The lad here made us all open our hearts. But did'st hear any news?"

"Yes, and bad news, too! Your enemies have rushed to the King with the tidings of the sacrilege practised to-day on the white stone."

"'Tis bad!" answered the Governor. "I had meant to send him word at once, but if they have forestalled me there is naught to do but await his commands."

José had been listening with strange wonder to this dialogue. He had not realized that the golden jewels that fell about him were his, and though he had seen them carried into the palace he did not connect them with himself. But his mind was made up. The King should have his treasure, and

the Governor and his son should take back as gifts the golden scabbard and the jewelled clasp.

When the meal was finished the Governor, at the wish of his children, had José's hoard spread out before them; and what an assortment! As the Governor had said, there was more in the collection than he could have forced from the citizens in a month, and the strange mixture proved that no one had been left unaffected. There was the Governor's scabbard, a necklace of jewels from the neck of the fairest lady of the city, a bag of gold with a miser's name upon it, and knives and tops, the offerings of children. The music of the harp had made the whole world unselfish.

The sight of all this wealth made everyone eager to hear José's history, and so with childlike simplicity he told how he had tried to watch Fedora's sheep, and how he had slept again and again, and how at last he had run away into the deep, black forest—and the little ones shuddered at the thought of it—and how he had been charmed to the feet of the magic musician, and how he had slept in the wondrous cave, and how he had been bidden to take the harp and seek the king, and how he had come upon a fierce wolf crouching in his path—and the little ones cried out with horror,—but he had trusted the harp, and it had hurled the snarling wolf from him; and how he had found Fedora moaning and groaning in her hut; how his music

had made her young and strong again—and the little ones laughed with glee,—and how she had chased him down the hillside—and they laughed still louder at his escape,—and how he had come to the gate, and how Lara had attempted to send an arrow through his instrument, and how his bow had been snapped and he himself cast down and stunned and bruised—here the little ones uttered an incredulous, Oh! It was impossible! Lara, the biggest man in the world; Lara, the most famous soldier of the King's Guard, vanquished by such a mite as this gipsy lad! Impossible! But there was the gold, and the scabbard of their father, and Henry's clasp; and their little eyes opened wide at the wonder of it all.

The Governor here took up the tale and told of the marvel of the scene in the square, and the miracles wrought on the crowd by the way, and when the tale was done it was time for all to seek their beds.

With this strange story still in her ears the wife of the Governor raised no objecting word when it was commanded that José should sleep in the Prince's room! He must indeed be under the protection of Heaven, or even a heavenly being in human form; and the little ones as they passed him looked him over critically to see if he had wings, but he was still a very ragged boy and not much cleaner than when he had left his mountain home.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN José was left alone he began to fear that during his sleep something might happen to his harp, and, to reassure himself that he was in a friendly place, he opened the door of his room to take one last peep along the brilliantly lighted corridor. As he did so he almost fell down from fright; for there, before his very door, filling the whole space with his huge bulk, stood a warrior clad in complete armour. He recognized Lara, the soldier who had only a few hours before attempted to send an arrow through his instrument, and who had had such a shaking up for his pains. He thought that the giant had come to take vengeance on him, and in his terror was about to fall at his feet and beg mercy, when the blunt soldier's kindly voice roared out the cheering words:

"Fear me not," he said; "I have come to guard you. It is the custom when a prince visits the palace of the Governor—and he has treated you as one—to guard his door while he sleeps. I have besought the Governor to let me stand here till morning breaks. He has granted my request, and no man shall pass this door excepting over my body. No, not the Governor himself!"

José, despite the kindly words, was still trembling.

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with fear, and Lara, seeing that he was a greater source of terror to the lad than any foes not yet in sight, said with a laugh:

"You need fear nothing from me. I would as soon think of touching you as I would an arrow just speeding from the bow. I'm much afraid if I did I would find myself hurled through the roof. Now to bed, and rest in peace; no one shall disturb your slumbers."

José felt that Lara was a friend, indeed, and he was soon snugly resting between the silken bed clothes that wooed his young eyes to slumber a very few minutes after he had laid his head upon the perfumed pillows.

While he was sleeping thus sweetly after his day of wonders, and while his young brain was filled with dreams of the King and the honors he was to receive from his hand on the morrow—fearing no ill, and thinking that no danger could befall him or his harp—dark plots were shaping in a young mind that had been free from evil till this day. The Governor's son, who had impulsively thrown his clasp at José's feet, had long been seeking some new pleasure for his King. Ever since the royal edict had gone forth he had struggled night and day to find something new, and now his ambition could not brook defeat. He had invented new games: arranged new dances; hunted the wood far and wide for new song birds and new flowers; he

had cultivated new fruits; and even written new poems—but from his efforts his King found no delight. All were old to him, and he pushed them aside with his kingly hand.

Now, having heard this music, he felt that it would be useless to try again—that at length a new thing had come that would satisfy the King's heart and make the giver the greatest person in the kingdom.

As he sat at the table listening to José's story of his life, and how he got the harp, his heart grew heavy and his mind burned with evil desires. What was to hinder him from possessing this harp, and, before morning broke, fleeing with it to the King! What good, reasoned he with himself, will the harp do this lad? Has he not broken the most sacred law of the land? Even if the King does acknowledge him the greatest musician of the world, will he not be forced to have him executed, or for ever stand before mankind as a monarch unable to keep his own laws? He himself would yet play this harp and the King would fall at his feet as all the world had done at José's. Oh! he thought, what sweet revenge it would be to see him lying in the dust after the way he has spurned my music, laughed to scorn my dances and games, and derided my verses. Yes, this harp will be mine, and before dawn I will stand with it at the King's palace.

After all the household had gone to bed and the guards were posted at the various entrances of the palace, he walked up and down his richly ornamented room harboring these evil thoughts. He had given way to ambition, and now that ambition was about to lead him into crime, and yet he could not turn back. He had been carefully trained, had been taught to be honorable in all things, and when his parents saw how earnest he was in his desire to give the King some new pleasure they warned him to be careful in his attempts to keep his honor unsullied. While the field was open for him with other competitors, he smiled at the thought of doing anything unworthy of the noble name he bore; but now that José had come with his magic music hope had been dethroned, but his ambition still goaded him on to another effort. He had done all he could by fair means, and he would win now even if he had to resort to foul ones. Trembling and pale, his head burning and his heart beating furiously with passion, he paced his room brooding over his evil resolves; and when the moon, shining in at his window, told him that the midnight hour had arrived, he cried, "I will do it." Stealthily opening his door he stepped on tiptoe into the dark shadows of the statues that lined the corridor. Slowly and cautiously he advanced towards the room where José slept; but suddenly he paused, for he saw before the door,

with its back turned towards him, a rigid statue taller than the tallest about him. It moved, and he knew that it was no statue, but Lara, the trustiest guard in his father's service.

"So!" he said to himself, "they are treating this beggar like a prince, giving him a guard, forsooth; a guard to keep my father's servants from stealing his rags. It is well for me that Lara had his back turned; the sound of his voice challenging me would have roused the whole house. I must get out of this without being seen."

This was not such an easy task, and a full hour elapsed before he had an opportunity of stealing back to his own room. When once within it he gave way to his rage.

"That little beggar to get the better of me in this way!" (He was blaming José for his own failure). As he spoke he walked hurriedly to and fro with blazing eyes and clinched hands.

"Ah!" he cried at length, "there is still a way. He is in the prince's room. A concealed door opens into it; I will get his harp, lower it to the garden, then away I will speed to the King."

As quick as thought he was out in the corridor again. This time he walked with no stealthy step. It was his custom to go into the garden on a summer's night, and dream and sing in the moonlight; the guards at the door knew his habit, and as he passed out with mantle carefully muffled about

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him, they smiled at the young dreamer, and nodded jokingly to each other, thinking what a fool he was to prowl about like the cats in the damp night air, when he might be resting quietly in his bed, enjoying, to their minds, the next best thing to a good meal, sound sleep.

He was soon in the garden passing among orange trees, fig trees, almonds, pomegranates; passing by walls clothed with a rich profusion of grapes which would have tempted another lad; but to him they were nothing. Although at other times the richness of the coloring, the sweet odors of the fruit, pleased his senses, now he heeded them not, as his mind and heart were bent on only one thing. For acres the garden spread about him, and beyond the walls rose the city, now still as death. No sound came from it, and he knew that the beggars, who prowled about while an eye was open to see them or an ear awake to hear their appeals, had all crept under the wall or into the arches of the bridges and were sleeping till morning. Nothing was to be feared, so he boldly prepared to carry out his plans.

To reach the secret door it was necessary to do some difficult climbing. There was no regular ladder, and the iron spikes protruding from the wall were rough and jagged, meet only for the rude hands of the soldiers. For many years they had not been used and were now thickly coated with rust. But he was making the effort of his life, and he heeded

not the difficulties. Firmly he gripped the first rough bar in his soft young hand, and pulled himself up to the second. Soon his hands were scratched and bleeding, but he did not desist. Up he went resolutely, and as he advanced from bar to bar his arms began to weaken and grow numb and his heart to falter. Only once he looked down, and then the trees and shrubs in the garden swam round in such confusion that he dared not repeat the glance. His hands almost lost their power to sustain his weight, and he began to think that he would have to let go and tumble into the trees that grew close against the wall, when the last spike was reached and he saw before his eyes the spring that at a touch would open a way into the treasure he had with such determination struggled to win. With haste he pressed it; but it was stiff from lack of use and would not answer his touch. Angrily he smote it with his bleeding hand, and the blow, shaking away the dust of time from the spring, caused the wall to open as noiselessly as if a moonbeam were forcing its way through the night. The sight of the opening gave him new courage and new strength, and he drew himself up till his hands gripped the inside of the thick wall, and he had to make but one more effort to pull himself out of danger. But here he rested awe-struck and wavering.

The moon was directly in front of the opening

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and as its light streamed into the room it fell across José sleeping sweetly on his silken couch, his pale young face and his dark hair illuminated by the silver light. A smile of contentment, of happiness, played about his young mouth. But this was no time to pause. There beyond him in the corner of the room stood the magic harp. This was no time for poetizing on the sleep of childhood; a sterner task was before the Governor's son, and boldly he drew himself up till he rested safely on the ledge, and then with cat-like tread entered the room. As he passed José's couch the lad heaved a heavy sigh, and disengaging one little arm from the bedclothes threw it heavily on the rustling coverlid. Trembling lest he had awakened him, the Governor's son stood still, scarcely daring to breathe. This was not his only cause for fear. Lara, too, heard the sigh, and as he bent to listen his sword clanked at his side and his helmet chain smote against his steel-clad shoulders. But the next moment the Governor's son heard the gruff words, "The lad but dreams!" and felt that Lara had resumed that rigid port that made him the envy of all soldiers.

There was no time to waste. Silently, stealthily, fearfully, he crept towards the harp that stood, as it were, challenging him to touch it. It was with difficulty that he could reach out his hand to grasp the ominous mantle that hid it from his

gaze. But at length he steeled his will, and with trembling hand hastily clutched at the treasure to gain which he had lost honor, love, truth, everything worth having. With an indescribable cry of pain he fell on the floor, writhing as though tortured by a thousand fiends.

In an instant the door was burst open and Lara strode into the room with drawn sword, ready to cut down the Evil One himself if he were present. His eyes first fell upon José sitting up in bed rubbing the sleep from his young eyes, and then he saw the writhing, moaning figure on the floor, and the open wall by which the thief had entered.

"You die!" he cried, and whirling his blade aloft leaped upon the prostrate lad.

But José was before him with a cry of "No, no! Spare him!" and he stood over the Governor's son right under the blade of the fierce soldier.

"It was the harp; it can protect itself! See! It is the Governor's son."

Just then hurried feet were heard rushing along the corridor, and the next moment the Governor and his immediate bodyguard stood in the room.

"What have we here!" he cried; and as he saw Lara standing with raised sword: "Hold, villain!" and leaping on him seized him by the throat.

But Lara heeded not his grip; the Governor was a powerful man, but his trusty guard stood firm and

unbending as an oak. He spoke only three words: "Behold your son!"

At the words the Governor's hand dropped like lead to his side, and looking at the prostrate figure saw that it was indeed his boy, his idol, lying on the floor pale as death, with an agonized expression on his face.

"What does this mean?"

"I know not," said Lara. "Behold the open wall; there stands the harp."

"Ah! you think he has attempted theft."

"I know not," answered the taciturn soldier.

"It is true! It is true!" groaned the penitent lad.

"Death to the thief, decree our laws—public death. We will save you that disgrace; Lara, do your duty, strike him down." But Lara as though fearing lest he would obey, hurriedly sheathed his sword and folding his arms exclaimed; "I have sworn allegiance to the harp, and when its master bids me refrain from bloodshed I cannot do otherwise."

"What, would you disobey me?" cried the angry father.

"I cannot do otherwise; he bade me spare your son."

"Then I will do it myself," and with hurried action he drew a dagger from his girdle and kneeling was about to plunge it into his son's breast; but José threw himself across the prostrate lad.





"Spare him, or slay me first!" he cried.

Struck with the lad's dauntless courage and noble self-sacrifice, the father dashed his dagger to the floor.

"He is spared, but he is yours. I give him to you, and let him serve you faithfully or he shall die by my own hand."

To his servants he cried: "Bear him hence, and if you say aught of what has happened here to-night you shall die."

The servants with trembling wonder bent over the lad to raise him from the floor, but the one who took hold of his left arm leaped back with a cry of horror. The boy had fainted and his limbs were limp and lifeless, but this arm had lost its roundness, its youth, and was shrivelled and withered like a piece of parchment. It was the arm with which he had attempted to seize the harp.

"He has been judged," cried the father. "Take him hence and when the world asks in what gallant encounter didst thou lose thy fair young arm, lower thine eyes and blush from burning shame."

But José interrupted: "Do not take him from me: you have given him to me; let him stay here till morning!"

He remembered how, when he had played at Fedora's wish her youth had been renewed, and the thought flashed upon him that the harp which had shrivelled up the strong arm might be able to

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restore it to all its strength. At any rate he would try its magic influence.

The Governor could do naught but comply, and after his son was borne to a silken couch and the wall closed by the spring of which he and his boy alone held the secret, all withdrew, leaving Lara standing at the door with the rigid dignity of a marble statue.

José lay down once more, and did not open his eyes till the grey morning light began to steal into the room through the little round, flower-like windows that studded the wall. He was soon out of bed and into his rags.

His first thought was of the lad who still lay there with that death-like pallor on his face, and a frightened look in his black eyes.

Soon José knew by the way the beams of light swept across the room that the sun was above the horizon. Quickly he uncovered his instrument, and taking it from its resting-place began to run his fingers across its strings in a song of refreshing, of healing. Softly the glow of health came back to the eyes of the suffering lad, slowly the pallor left his face, and ere the end of the song was reached he stood before José in full vigor; and as the last note died away he fell on his knees and kissed the bare feet of the harper.

The whole castle was now astir. Angel voices seemed to have visited every sleeping ear, and as

the soothing strains stole from room to room all hastened to hear its full, rich sweetness. Soon the corridors were crowded; servants, attendants, guards, the noble children, and their noble parents, forgetting rank, everything, held spell-bound by the music.

Among them José passed playing, followed by the lad he had restored to health; and so wonderful were his strains that ere the morning meal was ready those who had seen the tragedy of the night remembered it but as a dream. The stern father's heart, too, was softened, and forgiveness was in his look.

CHAPTER IX

SCARCELY had they finished their morning meal when a startling knock resounded through the palace. Three times the rapid clang rang out, and thrice were the three knocks repeated.

"The King's messenger!" was all the Governor said, but the shadow that passed across his face as he rose to meet the man admitted by the guards told that he feared for the future. He lost none of his dignity, however; and the messenger kneeling before him handed him a document sealed with a golden seal.

"Hast ridden hard?" he said, as he bade the young man rise. "Thou art hot and dusty."

"The King commanded speed, most noble Lord, though I fain would have been slow-footed on this errand."

"Dost know the reason of the visit?"

"Yea! Most noble Lord; thine enemies are with the King and have noised abroad the strange happenings of yesterday, so that the humblest servant at court knows as much about them as the King."

"Whether it be well or ill I know not," mused the Governor, "but the King's commands must be obeyed."

As he spoke he unrolled the sealed scroll and read as follows:

“Most trusted Lord: Last night, as darkness was approaching, a clamour was heard without our gates, and when they were thrown open several of the most respected citizens of your city stood before us with angry denunciations of an alleged sacrilege that occurred at sunset in your city, which things we can scarcely credit; and at an alleged breach of duty on your part in condoning the sacrilege, which we cannot believe. It appears from their reports, and in all there is remarkable similarity in the details, that a ragged gipsy lad had stood on the sacred stone, where never stood foot save the foot of prince or king, and that you, instead of striking him down, cast your sword of office at his feet; and that many other citizens, my subjects—indeed, according to the report, all save a few faithful ones that came with the tidings to me—acted in like manner. To thee they impute ambition (I am open with thee) and declare that thou art working, by means of subtle magic, to win the city from me, and in the end my kingdom. If this be true thou wilt probably try to escape (and I believe it not), but my arm will compass land and sea to strike down the traitor who has been trusted as never before was man trusted. Whether it be true or not I bid thee come at once, and bring with

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thee the lad who has thus set the world by the ears. I have seized thy traducers and their fate is in thy hands.

“CARLOS.”

As the Governor read he turned on the messenger a saddened face and said: “Save for the words about my ambition this is too true.”

“Thou art undone!” groaned the messenger.

“Nay, nay! Thou knowest not! My heart tells me all will yet be well. But let us to horse and away. Be it life or death, the King’s command brooks no tardy response. Be of good faith!” he said to his trembling wife and little ones. “The instrument that opened the heart of the greedy populace yesterday, that restored life to the withered arm of my erring lad, will surely soften the heart of our good King. But it is beyond my wisdom to see how he can at once keep his laws and spare our lives. But be of good faith! Naught of evil will come to us! I know not how we shall escape, but escape the wrath or even the displeasure of the great King, we shall.”

“Where abides the King?” he said, turning to the messenger.

“At the hill fortress!”

“Come, José,” he said, “we must to our fate.”

But José had no fear; his heart burned within him to see the King, of whom, even in the seclusion

of the hills, marvellous tales had reached his ears; but he was nevertheless glad when in the cavalcade that assembled at the door he saw the towering form of his burly friend Lara.

Now José had never mounted a horse before, not even a mule, and when he saw that he must ride he began to fear for his harp lest he should fall and crush it. At first it is difficult to have faith in untried circumstances, and only after a thing has proved itself many times do we rely on it in all cases. Especially did he tremble when he saw the well-groomed, beautifully-caparisoned shining steeds curvetting, and prancing, and pawing while they impatiently waited for their riders to mount. Lara, the faithful, saw his fright, and lightly lifting him, harp and all to the pommel of his saddle (for José would not let his instrument out of his hands), sprang up behind him. When all were mounted the cavalcade slowly wended its way towards the fortress of the King.

There was a strange silence among the travellers. The uncertainty of the future seemed to weigh upon them all, and no man spoke. Even the horses seemed to have caught something of their riders' gloom, and they moved forward as though reluctant to bear their burdens to their destination. At last the high hill on which the fortress stood loomed up before them. How different it was to José's young eyes from the beautiful, sunny castle he had just

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left. There it stood like a pile of huge rocks, and behind it the dark forest cast long shadows. The sun had been shining brightly while they journeyed on the way, but now a dark cloud overhung forest and fortress, a black cloud that seemed to threaten destruction to the approaching horsemen.

A strange castle it was, perched on that rugged hilltop, with but one narrow pathway, with barely room for a single chariot, leading to its hidden entrance between hills that rose in sharp pinnacles on all sides. Here no army could advance, and only treachery could have won a way into this, the strongest fortress in the land. But if nature had done much to make it impregnable, art had done more. The walls, which in the distance had seemed small against the rugged hills, now in their massive grandeur looked like hills upon hills.

Towers strong and thick bristled with engines of war, and all along the embattled parapets stood steel-clad soldiers with mighty cross-bows, ready at the nod of their commanders to check with steady aim the approaching company.

Soon the riders reached the broad moat and paused at the brink till the ponderous drawbridge, with clanking chains and creaking iron hinges, was lowered to let them pass. Once within the heavy gates, thick as walls and made impenetrable with their oak beams and steel facings, they dismounted, and about them closed a company of

soldiers with battle-axes raised to their shoulders, gleaming with cruel glint.

Yesterday these men would have bowed low before the great Governor, but on this day he came before them as one accused of treason; and though they could not credit the rumours that had found their way from the King's chamber to the guard-room, still they dare not show even respect to one deemed a traitor, and in stolid silence they marched beside him and his friends till they were halted in the presence-chamber of the King.

Now the King was in ill-humor; first, because the only man he had ever been able to trust fully was accused of being unfaithful to him; he was in ill-humor, too, because the restless night had left him peevish and cross, and his breakfast had not been to his taste, for being a king he dearly loved good eating and good drinking; and thirdly, he was in ill-humor because he and his queen, though sitting side by side, would not even speak to each other. He had been irritable, and though he was a king he was still a man, and while the true victims of his anger were approaching he had vented some of his ill-humor on those immediately about him. It was a gloomy court into which the prisoners of state—for such they now were—were ushered. King, Queen, counsellors, guards, all wore brows black as night.

“Bring forward the accusers!” shouted the King.

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With triumphant step two of the most powerful citizens of the King's domain stepped before their monarch. Each hated the Governor and had long waited for an opportunity to do him an injury, with the hope that his high office would fall to them; and now the opportunity had come. He was soon to be humbled in the dust. Nay, more! that head, which, as he passed them by, was held erect with such haughty scorn, would soon be lopped from his shoulders.

The Governor saw the look of hate and triumph in their eyes, but no shadow of fear was on his face.

The King, too, saw it, and likewise the Governor's bold, straight-forward glance, which won his admiration. He had trusted this man beyond all men; he could still trust him. This rumour, these accusations, could not be true, and so with an angry voice he exclaimed: "Traducers of this righteous man, now that he is before you repeat the story you dinned into my ears last night."

But they had no fear.

"O most mighty King!" they began in chorus—

"One at a time! You, Sirrah, poured forth the tale last night; your comrade in falsehood can relate it now, and if your story varies from his by so much as a word, off goes your head."

"There is little to tell, O most mighty Monarch! Last night at sunset I entered the great square and saw this wretched lad standing on the great stone

of our people; around him crowded the men, the women, the children of our city; the houses were empty, the shops were left unattended, the stalls stood without watchers. All worshipped him with their faces in the dust as though he were already King. Suddenly into the square galloped this man, whose duty—"

"Never mind his duty!" interrupted the King. "I know his duty!"

"Suddenly into the square galloped this man, who instead of striking down the sacrilegious intruder, cast his sword at his feet, uncovered his head, and fell in the dust as though he were in the presence of the King."

"Why didst not thou and thy fellows fall upon him and rend him?"

"O most mighty Monarch! So strange was the music and the sight that for a moment we were as if under a spell, but when the music ceased and our senses returned to us, we were fain to reverence thy laws. Many tried to strike down this devil's child—for such we deem him—but this man called for his guard, and with spear and battle-axe protected him from our rage and led him straight to his own palace. Naught could we do but hasten to thee with our tale, lest rebellion should arise and find thee unprepared, and our reward is these chains that clank at our wrists; but," he continued humbly, "that matters not so long as thou art

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warned and the danger to thy crown and life is averted."

The King looked sharply at the hypocrite, but there was as much humility in his mien as in his words, and he was deceived.

"Humph!" he said. "Thou seemest to speak truth, and yet I have known thee to be false. We shall see." Then, turning to his Governor, he added: "Is this tale true or false?"

"True, O King!"

"What! You saw this wretch standing on the stone where never yet stood foot save that of king or prince, and did not strike him down?"

"True! O mightiest Monarch!"

"And you protected him from the crowd with your imperial guard?"

"True! Though he needed not my protection; he has powers beyond our ken. Our small guard would have made but feeble resistance to the mob, but he was greater than even the crowd or our soldiers."

The King's eyes opened wide as he looked from his Governor to the swarthy, ragged, urchin that stood before him clutching his precious harp. At first he was inclined to believe the Governor mad or joking; but he was in no laughing humor.

"Where spent he the night?" he asked sharply.

"In my palace, in the Prince's room, O noble King!"

"In the Prince's room!" shouted the King. "Treason! Treason! To the block with him! To the block with him! Wouldst have placed him on our throne next! You did well, knaves, to bring me tidings of this rebel's doings. To the block with him!"

As he spoke his faithful attendants, obeying his nod, seized the Governor on either hand; but he showed no signs of wavering.

"Before thou doest thy will on me, O King, behold this! If I am guilty others have sinned with me. Thou seest this wallet with the name graven on its clasp—my accuser's name! This, too, was found at the feet of the lad. A week ago he could not pay his rightful taxes to his monarch, and now he can cast ten times the amount at the feet of him whom I, forsooth, am accused of trying to place on thy throne. And this jewelled dagger, long the wonder of our citizens! Well thou knowest, O Monarch, that it was the property of this my other accuser. If I am guilty they, too, are equally guilty. These were found among the treasures showered upon the musician by the enraptured citizens."

"Off with their heads!" shouted the Monarch, in black wrath. "Off with their heads! Traitors all! And you, knave," he said, turning angrily upon Lara, "what art thou doing here? Why art not at thy gate? Did I not bid thee hold that post

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under penalty of death, and that penalty thou shalt receive."

"'Tis well! O most mighty King," said Lara bowing, "but I have sworn, with your permission, to serve only this lad and his instrument."

"Thou hast, villain! Traitor! Treason! To the block with him!"

During this questioning and this exhibition of anger on the part of the monarch, José stood shaking with fright. He had been eager to meet the King, but a million times he had wished himself back in the mud hut on the hillside. Fedora might threaten to take off his head, but here was a man who not only threatened, but could command that such a noble man as the Governor, such a sturdy soldier as Lara, should be taken to the block, and who, moreover, had his attendants at hand to see that his commands were carried out. He felt his own turn must come very soon, and he had not long to wait.

The King turned on him with angry look and fiercely asked: "Thy name, knave?"

"José!"

"José what?"

"Only José!"

"What did'st do?"

"Watched sheep!"

"'Twere well with thee had'st thou stayed with

thy sheep. Thou must die! But who sent thee hither?"

"He who gave me this harp."

As he spoke, José drew the black covering from his precious instrument, just as the sun broke through the clouds that were hanging over the fortress. As the monarch's eye fell upon it he shouted in rage, "Seize him! Smash his harp into a thousand pieces."

Several guards with raised axes leaped forward to do his bidding, while Lara laughed grimly as he thought of the surprise that was in store for them; but before they could strike either José or his harp he had touched the strings with loving fingers and they leaped to life, to song. At the first note the raised axes fell to the ground, the anger died from the King's brow, and the smile came back to the Queen's face. On and on José played a song of forgiveness.

He forgot about the danger threatening himself; he only knew that his friends, the Governor and Lara, were ordered to their deaths. He willed that the King should forgive them, should pardon them; and the harp rang forth his will. The spell seized all; they forgot themselves, their surroundings, everything; and when at last his hands fell to his sides the King rose from the royal chair.

"All are pardoned," he cried. "The new thing has been found; the King's Wish has been granted

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him. Ye did well to do obeisance to this more-than-earthly musician."

"Down, knaves," he added, to the two citizens that had been in such haste to destroy the Governor. "Down! and crave your lives of the chief of your city!"

His words were unnecessary. They had already thrown themselves at the Governor's feet.

"But," meditated the King, "how will I escape the gibe of not maintaining my kingdom's laws? I can pardon my Governor and Lara, and these knaves; they were condemned by my own words, but this lad—is it not written that he who stands on the sacred stone which fell from heaven as the footstool for our first great king; is it not written that he who stands on the sacred stone, be he not king or prince, must pay the penalty with his life."

All this while the Queen had been gazing with affectionate eyes on the strange lad, and her woman's wit came to the rescue. She turned to her husband and whispered to him a few swift words:

"'Tis well! 'Tis well! Thou hast saved us," said the King. "The beggar dies, and the new thing shall stay in our kingdom."

His words fell on the ears of the Governor and Lara and José, causing them to have strangely mixed feelings. He threatened death, but his tones said that he meant life.

CHAPTER X

ALL WAS bustle and confusion in the hill fortress for the next two hours. The King had decided that this matter must be ended by sundown, and that the just and fitting place to conclude it was the Royal Square in the city where the offence had occurred. That it was to be no trifling matter was evident to all by the extent of the preparations for the journey. The Royal Guard was ordered out to a man, and as they sat on their beautiful white Arabs in the vast courtyard on either side of the splendidly caparisoned steed that awaited the King, José began to realize that the tales that had come to him over the far mountains of his sovereign's might and magnificence were no idle stories told by a winter's fire, but that the reality far surpassed even his wildest dreams. Behind this fine company of horsemen assembled a mighty army of foot soldiers. The whole square appeared packed from fortress wall to outer gate with warriors gleaming in rich armour, straight as forest pines, strong as oaks.

José was not the only one who wondered at the extensive preparations. The soldiers themselves could not understand why they had been called out

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in such force, and why only a few of their comrades were left upon the watch-towers.

The Governor of the city was equally amazed. Could the King still have doubts of his loyalty; and was he going forth ready to slay all who showed the slightest sign of disloyalty! But, no; that was impossible, for behold he was coming forth accompanied by his Queen, and she never went with him to scenes of battle or blood. His amazement increased when he saw the keeper of the Crown following in his rear; and it grew still greater when behind this officer came the two keepers of the royal wardrobe. Was he dreaming? What could it all mean? The excitement of the day had left him tired and exhausted—could it be that he slept? But the King's voice roused him.

"Sir, this is the first time thou hast ever appeared before me without thy sword since I gave it thee. It shall be restored to thee, and never let me see thee before me unless it be girded upon thy thigh."

With these words he beckoned to a mounted officer—the one who had borne the warning message to the Governor—and bade him speed to the Governor's palace and bring to the Royal Square in the city the sword without which the Governor was but as any ordinary citizen. Scarcely was the message given when like a bolt from a cross-bow the messenger sped through the hastily-opened

gates, and down the narrow path between the towering hills. After him slowly followed the cavalry, the bearers of Crown and wardrobe, the King and Queen and their guards, and the host of foot soldiers.

Usually the King was the centre of attraction when he went forth in state, but on this occasion José, who sat in front of Lara, drew the attention of all. The Governor had been pardoned, his false accusers had been forgiven, the life of this lad alone was in danger. The law demanded his death, and yet the state executioner was not with them. He had been left behind to sharpen his axes and to mope over the victims who had escaped; for when he had heard of the Governor's act he had, though he thought well of the Governor, exulted in the thought that at length he would be able to try his skill on a worthy head.

They could only wonder and wonder; but the merry face of their monarch and the smiling eyes of their usually sad Queen told them that nothing of a very serious nature could be about to occur unless some disturbance should arise among the populace.

Soon they were out of the hills, and the vast city lay in the valley, bright and beautiful in the afternoon sun. The sentries on the gates had seen them afar off, and soon everyone was aware that the King, with not only his guard, but his foot

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soldiers as well, was drawing nigh. Fear seized the citizens. They knew that the King had heard of their treasonable acts of worship to the sacrilegious musician; and they deemed that he was coming to make an example of them.

All were equally guilty; all feared for their necks. Punish every sinner he could not, for that would leave him with but few subjects in his most important city. So the rich and powerful thought he would slay them to show his strength and to confiscate their estates; and the poor and worthless thought they would be taken as they could be most easily spared. As a result all were thoroughly alarmed and miserable as the King's army, like a devouring dragon, wound down the long road.

When the gate guardians saw the long line approach, the heavy gates were swung shut and the ponderous drawbridge reared itself creaking and groaning high above the deep and broad moat. The law of the city demanded that when an armed body approached, be it friend or foe, the city should be placed on the defensive until the trumpet challenged the gate; and so, though all knew full well that it was the King who drew nigh, the usual preparations were made, even to the drawing up of the bowmen with arrows on their bowstrings at every loophole.

Soon a trumpeter galloped at full speed from the approaching force, nor did he rein his steed till he reached the broad moat. Then he sent forth a

long, commanding blast. The King spoke through him, and as his notes echoed along the wall and far through the distant hills, the bowmen thrust their arrows into their quivers, the axe-men lowered their shining weapons, the keeper of the bridge pressed the levers and the great drawbridge swung out and down; and by the time the first of the cavalcade had reached the trumpeter the huge wings of the gate swung open and the broad way into the populous city stretched before the King.

It looked not as it usually did when his Majesty visited his capital. The city guard lined either side of the road, but otherwise it was empty. On former visits it had been no easy task to keep the vast throng from crowding in upon the royal party. Now, however, terror and uncertainty possessed all. Many had concealed themselves in their houses; shop-keepers and the keepers of stalls went about their business as though they were in no way partners in the general sacrilege; and even the toilers on the walls—rude fellows from the low country by the sea and from the hills—looked not up from their work. All had sinned in not striking down the offender, and each one felt that he might be made to suffer for the sin. So the King reached the great Royal Square and the sacred stone, where stood its guards with quaking hearts.

Behind the great stone the King drew up his trusted troops in battle array and then sent his

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trumpeter to summon all the citizens to his presence. Old and young must come; woe to him who should stay away! Through the streets and lanes galloped the trumpeter ringing the King's command to all, and soon the square began to fill with rich and poor, old and young, men and women. If the silence had been ominous before, it was a hundredfold more so now. The square was packed with a sea of faces gazing in terror at the King, in wonder and hate on José, who had drawn on them the wrath of their monarch—and not a little intensity was added to their hate as they thought of the valuables which they had cast at his feet the day before.

When the King felt that all were assembled, his trumpeter pealed forth a note demanding silence and the whispering and very breathing seemed to cease. Then the monarch rose on the sacred stone and his kingly voice sounded like a trumpet through the broad square, while all stood with uncovered and bowed heads.

"My people!" he said, "a sin has been committed against our laws, a sin that cannot be forgiven; and in that sin you are all more or less guilty." (At this a groan rose from a thousand throats). "But I have pardoned the Governor, the guards, and you."

"Long live the King!" burst in upon his speech, and it was not until the trumpet again demanded silence that he could make himself heard.

"But our laws must be kept. It reads, death to any one not a prince or king who stands upon the sacred stone. Yesterday a stranger, not a prince or king, stood where I now stand. What shall be done with him, O my people?"

"Let him die! Let him die!" rose from the vast concourse.

"So be it!" and as José heard the fatal words his heart almost ceased beating; but Lara whispered to him: "Fear nothing, a smile plays about the King's mouth, and when he slays his brow is ever like a thunder cloud ready to burst."

"But," continued the King, "we must first hear him. Let him stand where he stood yesterday, and repeat his offence, and then I will hand him over to you who sinned with him."

The King then stepped from the stone, and commanded José to take his place. Slowly, with trembling limbs, he ascended and faced the vast concourse. Hatred scowled from every face about him, and angry murmurs, growls, and hisses arose on all sides, like the sound of the sea on a rocky beach at the first approach of storm. He heeded this for but a moment. Quickly he drew the covering from his instrument, and, mid the sea of angry sound, which even the King began to dread, for he had signalled to his captains to be ready to press back the mob, began to gently stroke the chords. He had been given over to this crowd; he

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would soften their hearts, so he willed, and as he willed he played. Gently the music swelled out till all were awed into silence; gently he played till pitying tears for his youth came to every eye; then he swayed and rocked as his young fingers clanged out the full song of pardon. He made them feel that they had been forgiven and now that he was in their power they must save him. Nor did he cease till he knew that there was no man or woman present but would gladly die for him; and then with a closing ringing chord that seemed to say, "Pardon him, O King!" he stopped playing; but before the strings had ceased quivering from his touch the whole populace fell prostrate on their knees, crying, "Pardon him, O King!" Their voices swelled forth in a mighty chorus, but the King sternly replied: "It is impossible. A law is a law, and unless he be crowned a prince he must die."

With the same enthusiasm as at first the crowd replied: "Crown him, O King! We cannot but obey one sent from heaven."

"Consider well, O people, what ye do! If I crown him then will he have power of life and death over you. But as you say, he may indeed be heaven-sent. I stand before you sonless, without kith or kin. My crown when I die must go to strangers; and doubtless heaven has sent this lad, with power such as no king ever wielded, to aid me in ruling a turbulent people, and perchance to take

the sceptre from my hand when I can no longer hold it. Consider well what ye do, O people! Shall the beggar die, and shall a prince stand in his place?"

"Crown him, O King," rose the vast cry. "Crown him, crown him! We accept him as our prince, our ruler!"

From the troop of astonished horsemen the King beckoned his crown-bearer and the keepers of the wardrobe, and bade them get ready for the coronation.

First they produced a pair of golden shoes, and slipped them on José's naked feet; then a white robe richly embroidered, symbolical of purity and strength of purpose, was cast about his shoulders and fastened at his waist with a silken girdle.

All this made him look very fine indeed, but made him likewise very hot and uncomfortable, but princes have to endure things that are not suffered by ordinary mortals.

Robed in the coronation robe, and with the coronation shoes on his feet, he looked every inch a prince; and the people forgot that underneath that gorgeous garb was a ragged urchin like unto the boys who begged or piped through their streets from morn till night. The ceremony was not over, however. The King bade him kneel and took with his own hand a plain circle of gold and resting it on José's black, curly locks, cried in a loud voice so

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that all present might hear him, "Rise, O Prince! Learn well to obey thine own laws and this people shall obey thee."

The King, as was the custom, paused, and looking over the vast crowd awaited their reply. Suddenly every right hand was raised, and the cry, "We will! We will! We swear it!" rang forth.

On the instant the trumpeter sent forth a mighty peal, and lo! José was next to the King in authority; and he then realized the truth of the mountain musician's words, "You are master of the grandest instrument in the world."

So long had the march to the city, the assembling of the citizens, and the coronation taken, that already the day was far spent, and the sun was casting its level rays across the earth; but before they could leave this sacred spot another ceremony had to be performed.

The Governor, by casting his sword at José's feet on the previous day had forfeited his right to rule the city, and so the King commanded the messenger he had so hurriedly dispatched from his castle to give Prince José the sword and bade the Governor kneel at his feet. As the Governor obeyed, José blushed for very shame. He knew not how to act, and yet he must act as a prince. Words would not come. As he saw the Governor at his feet, he remembered his nobility, his truth, his kindness, his wisdom; and with a clear voice

he cried; "Take it, and rule as thou hast ever ruled!"

"Nobly said," broke in the King. "He is indeed a Prince!"

The sun was now slowly sinking beneath the horizon, but before it disappeared from view José seized his instrument, and played a song of triumph and thanksgiving. The people listened in rapt amazement, the King even uncovering his head in the presence of a power mightier than his own. At length, however, the sun sank beneath the distant hills and the music softly died away. As before, the people cried out, "Play on!" and even the King uttered the cry; but José smiled and covering the sacred harp stepped from the stone, feeling himself a prince and conqueror indeed.

Now the royal forces made ready to return to the King's mountain stronghold, but José was not to return as he had come. As Prince he was entitled to a seat in the royal car with the Queen, and there he took his place, much to the regret of Lara.

The crowd would fain have followed the magic harper and their King through the city; but before he gave the command to advance the trumpeter sent out a blast commanding all to disperse to their occupations; and soon the broad square was silent and empty as when they had entered it.

As the citizens talked over the strange occurrences of the day they showed great differences of opinion

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as to the musician. One had noticed, as the white robe fell about the lad's shoulders, white wings; while another, as he raised his little brown foot for the golden shoe, was equally sure that he had seen a cloven hoof. But, be he devil or angel, he was their prince by their own repeated wish, and they must obey him.

That night, as José lay awake in a gorgeous room in the high castle, strange were the thoughts that flashed through his mind. But yesterday worth two sheep, he said to himself, and to-day honored by a whole people, living as the King lives; servants, soldiers, statesmen, to do his behests. It could not be; it was all a dream! But then he remembered the splendid meal he had had; the luxurious bath; the servants who had anointed his body and the rich robes that were given him; and he knew it was all true. But these things he must not love; he must be faithful to the giver of them; and with this thought he fell asleep, nor did he wake until morning burst upon the world.

CHAPTER XI

JOSÉ was now a prince, and the realization of this fact seemed to work a change in his nature. He must no longer be the idle, dreaming lad who had played and slept and eaten and bathed his hot, tired feet in the living waters of his mountain streams. A prince he was and a king he might be, and to be worthy of such a high position, such responsibility, he must become like a king in character. But how could he do this?

At first he thought of his harp. It would grant his every wish, but when he tried to wish he knew not what to wish; for what a king knew, what a king did, what a king desired, he understood but vaguely. And now it dawned upon him that while his harp could grant him much, there were many things he must get by his own exertions. What was beyond his human faculties his harp could grant him, but not what he could do for himself. A prince in deed as well as in name he would become, and so, like a wise lad, he determined to watch the King and Queen, and make an effort to grow like them.

But how could he leave his harp when engaged in his tasks? This difficulty was soon removed. In his room a case of triple steel, decorated with gold

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and silver ornaments, was constructed for him, and Lara, who was now his faithful body servant, watched over it in his absence. Not that the harp needed such protection, for no hand save José's dared rest upon it; but so much of the human clung to him that he could not fully realize this, and even when it was so protected and guarded he would frequently rush to his chamber to see if all were well with his treasure.

In the meantime, his education went on. He realized that a prince must be clean in body; that it would not do to go from morning till night, and indeed often for days at a time without a bath, and so he submitted himself to his attendants who bathed and anointed him and clothed him in robes heavy with ornaments, rich and beautiful, and at first very uncomfortable.

What a change this new life worked in José. How beautiful he seemed in his new apparel! The King and Queen gazed upon him in wonder. Unused to luxury, having lived in the open air, he had about him something of the freshness and wild beauty of a mountain flower. As they saw him wearing his honors so well, they felt that no mistake had been made, that he was not only a god-sent musician, but a heaven-sent prince as well. But it was not sufficient that he should move like a prince and look like a prince; he must be a prince indeed; and this was not easy. He knew much

about Nature; the songs of birds, the flowers, the rocks, and changing hues of the sky were familiar to him; but there his knowledge ended. This wisdom would avail him but little when the time came for him to take his place in the councils of the nation, and so it was necessary that the greater world of learning should be opened to him. Tutors, the most learned in the land, came at the King's bidding to prepare him for his life's work. At first he hated the dull monotony of the parchments he had to learn to read; but when he realized how much such knowledge meant to him he went to work with a will, and as new truths came to him, as new light shone upon the world of Nature and of man, he knew not which he delighted in most—the wonder-working harp that had been given him with which he could do such marvels, or the wonder-working learning that opened to him such vast worlds, ever opening, ever broadening.

As he grew in years, he grew in wisdom and a desire for knowledge, and for this the Queen loved him more and more. The King would have had it otherwise. He cared but little about the dry and musty parchments that José delighted to pore over. He would have had him spend more of his time in what he deemed kingly pastimes—tilting and riding, hunting and archery. He would have had him learn to delight in the clash of sword against sword, and to smile when the blood flowed from the gaping

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wound. But José's nature shrank from such things, and the King had to be satisfied.

He had his wish. The new thing had come to him and stayed with him, ever new. No matter what mood he was in, no matter what care weighed upon him, he could find comfort, solace, forgetfulness in the strange music that had ennobled his life, soothed his weary body and brain, softened his heart, and given him a wisdom beyond his fellow monarchs.

Through the years José played and played, and his fame was spread abroad to all nations. Pilgrims came from afar to wonder or worship,—for many deemed him heaven-sent—and while the sun was in the heavens he never refused to bless mankind with his gift. As the years went by he learned to realize his power. He understood what the old harper meant when he said it was the Harp of the Sun. What the Sun was to Nature, its music was to man. As the flowers burst into bloom, the trees into leaf, the fields into green beauty beneath the beneficent rays of the Lord of Day, so it would bring peace, beauty, and happiness to all lives that came under its influence.

But it could do other work than this. Once a great chief came to do homage to his King, while in his black heart he meant to plot his ruin. So well did he dissemble that all were deceived save José, and when he was urged to play in his presence,

at first he refused; and the entreaties of the Queen or the frowns of the King could not make him change his resolution; but an ironical word from the traitor made him smite his instrument with angry fingers, and play as he had never played before. A fierce, passionate, angry cry throbbed from his instrument, and before he had finished, the traitor was on his knees confessing his guilt and the guilt of his associates in a base plot to murder his monarch and usurp the throne. But for José this confession would have cost the conspirators their lives. The King was only a king, but the Prince craved as a boon that the chief's life and the lives of his companions in crime should be spared. The King granted the boon, and the crestfallen chief went to his own distant district to spread still more the marvels of the musician prince, and to watch the King's interests and to labor for his King as he had never done before.

With each triumph of his will and harp, José's soul grew stronger and his heart happier, and with strength and joy he had but one desire—to make all men like himself; but this seemed impossible. While he was still young and untempted by the world a power had been given him on which he could lean when the heart burned with ambition and the eye coveted what it saw. He was not forced, like the King and his Queen, to depend on himself for strength. As he grew to manhood, he

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pitied them more and more in their struggle after the peace of soul that was his continually. He pitied his Queen most of all. Her hair was turning white with years, her cheek had lost its youthful freshness, and she went about as one burdened with a load of sorrow.

Such was indeed the case. José, when by his art he had charmed her spirit from darkness to sunshine, had often asked her to tell him why his instrument could not banish her grief permanently; and why it was that often her sighs were heaviest when he had played his best and strongest. But she would never answer him by words; and would only bend over him and kiss him on the brow as though trying to fill a void in her heart.

Once, however, when the King had been on a long journey to a far sovereign, and she had been left much in the Prince's company, she realized that he was no longer a mere child, but a man capable of sharing her secret thoughts, and so when he for the thousandth time asked her to tell why, when the whole earth seemed so happy, when she had so much to make her glad—a noble husband, a loyal people, riches without comparison—she was often in tears, she turned to him and, bidding him lay his harp aside, told him why no day passed without her grief finding expression in tears, and why it was that she would not leave this mountain palace, but stayed there even during the gloomy winter

months, when the sunny valleys called to her to come and enjoy them. She had had a sweet child, a little girl, who, had all been well, would have been about José's age. She had made an idol of her little one; she had never been out of her thoughts, and, as she said it, she gave a deep sigh that made José wish he had power to bring back the dead. But the mother, going on with her story, said that one hot summer's day Isabel, tired with play, fell asleep on the sward in front of the castle while the streaming sun beat down upon her. When she was discovered, all their efforts could not rouse her; and when the leech was called, he pronounced that though she was not dead, he doubted if he could save her life.

"In the bitterness of my grief," said the Queen, "I commanded him to restore her to me or to the block he would go. Save her life he did; but for what a fate! For days, for weeks he toiled over her, but she only lay as one in a trance; at last her eyes opened, and I looked upon her with love and spoke to her, but no recognizing look met mine. Instead, a wild stare, a stare as of madness! She was mad, and the leech declared that though her life was saved, her reason he could not save. That was beyond his skill."

"So she has lived on. The King seems to have forgotten her existence. I only and her attendants appear to know that she lives. We have kept her

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in a remote corner in this very castle, where her cries cannot be heard, and woe be to anyone who would visit her quarters."

José now understood what the forbidden wing meant, and a quick plan formed itself in his brain.

"Each morning," continued the Queen, "she is clothed as a princess should be robed, and each evening she has rent her garments into tatters. Her wild beauty remains, but she knows me not; I often wish that she might die, that the evil spirits that possess her might leave her fair young body."

"Wish not her death," cried José. "Her reason shall be restored. Lead me to her!"

"Her reason shall be restored?" cried the Queen, embracing his knees.

"Yes! if the Sun can destroy, the Harp of the Sun can restore. Lead me to her," he said, imperiously, and the Queen rose, dazed, and bade him follow.

Could it be possible, she thought, that her child would be brought back to her! Could it be possible that all these years there had been within her grasp the great remedy she had prayed for during all her waking hours, and she had never had the wisdom to reach forth her hand and seize it? The miracles of the harp she had seen, but in her weakness of soul she had never dreamt that it could perform such a miracle as José was now about to attempt.

Through the long corridor she led him, and as she approached the room where her daughter lay with her garments rent and her flesh bruised, she almost ceased breathing. But the maniac had seen her and José, and leaping from the floor of the room, seized the grated door and shook it, madly screaming: "Old witch, old cat, why do you bring that devil to torture me?"

What a strange sight it was, that beautiful young maniac, and how horrible to hear her cries! She was as fair as a woodland blossom, and but for the fierce light in her eyes, the mad screams, and the tattered garments she wore, no one would have known that she was not as sane as José. For a moment José was stunned by this new experience and forgot his music, till he felt the Queen's arm leaning heavily upon his as if for support.

Then he uncovered his harp, and gazing full in the face of the maniac, appealed to the Sun to aid him, to undo the work it had done, to make whole again the flower it had blighted. As he prayed silently, he touched the vibrant strings and a soothing strain breathed gently along the corridors. It startled the Princess; but only seemed to enrage her the more, and she seized the gratings of her cell door and tugged fiercely at them as though she would break out and rend her tormentors. But the music ceased not; it grew stronger and yet

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more soothing; at last it reached her long-smothered intelligence. Her hands ceased straining at the gratings and fell limp and lifeless at her side. José was conquering; he saw it, and put all his soul and will into his playing. The light of love came back to those wild eyes; but as he played her face grew pale as one smitten unto death, and at last, with a cry that penetrated to the farthest corner of the lofty palace, she fell headlong on the floor of her cell.

The Queen, as she saw the old look return to her child's face, saw her grow human once more, rejoiced in her soul. José's music was working its crowning miracle; but at that cry she grew blind with despair. She had had her child restored but to lose her; that cry surely meant death.

The leech and the attendants of the Princess had rushed to the cell on hearing the weird, wild shriek. The door was flung back; and the wise physician bent over the prostrate girl. At length he rose, his face radiant with joy.

"She is not dead," he said; "she is but in a trance."

Scarcely had he spoken when a faint whisper left the motionless lips.

"How hot it is!" she sighed.

"Patience," said the leech. "She thinks she is a child again, lying on the sward in the sun."

"How hot it is! Carry me into the palace!"

Then her eyes opened and they saw that she would indeed live.

"Mother, have I been long here?"

But there was no reply; the Queen could only kiss her hands and her face and her wild hair.

Then the Princess noticed her torn garments, her naked feet and arms, and cried out, "Where am I? What am I?"

"Sweet one, you will know all soon," said the Queen. "You have long been ill; but the Prince, your brother, has charmed you back to life and to us."

Then the Princess turned to José, and the memory of the music that had wrought such a change in her came back, and she flung her arms about his neck and kissed his warm young lips.

Strange feelings stirred José. His heart was moved with a love he had never felt for Zora or the harp, but as his fingers happened to touch the uncovered instrument beside which he stood, a strangely harsh sound grated from its strings. It awoke him from the quick dream that had possessed him, and he crushed back the rising feeling of love. He hastily drew the covering over his harp, and with an imperious mien seized it, and without a word hastened away from the astonished group that were filled with joy at the act of the Princess. It was well, they thought; his harp had made him a Prince, his harp had restored their Princess, and

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in that moment of triumph they saw him with the Princess as his queen seated on the throne.

For the first time since José had received his harp in its woodland home, it was a burden to him. He was tired with the weight of it when he reached his own chamber; for, will as he would, that kiss was still burning in his heart.

But he must conquer, and bolting his door and uncovering his treasure, he sat before it and prayed it to keep him faithful to his vow. He had been sorely tempted; but after a tempestuous struggle his old strength returned. The vision of the beautiful, mad girl, the touch of the kiss vanished from his heart, and he was once more strong in his determination to know but one master. His power over the strings was restored, and the music welled forth as of old with balm and strength in its notes. No king, no princess, could again make him unfaithful, even in thought.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER the recovery of the Princess, who had long been deemed dead by everyone in the kingdom save her immediate attendants at the mountain palace, Prince José was held in still greater reverence than before. He had been thought a being possessed of miraculous gifts, but this last miracle made many bend their knees to him as to a god; and when he went abroad in the kingdom, people prostrated themselves in the dust before him in humble worship. Such homage had never been done the King save on great occasions; but the King was not jealous. He loved José as a son, and longed for the time when he could announce to his subjects that he was about to bestow the hand of his daughter on their future king. In this thought, although his hair was now white with age, he grew ever happier.

It was otherwise with José. He was loved, and he knew it. The soft, dark eyes of the Princess, whose reason he had restored, glowed with happiness when he was in her sight, and a tender word from him would set her heart singing. She had known no girlhood; from a child she had become a woman, but much of a child's confidence and

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outspoken manner remained with her, and she could not keep from José her feelings for him.

At times the Prince still felt that first warm kiss on his lips, but the woodland musician's warning words were constantly in his mind, and he crushed back thoughts of love. As a result he remained much alone. Stealing to his room and bolting his door, he would converse for hours at a time with his harp. It solaced him, it strengthened him; but, with all the comfort and strength it brought, his heart ached within him. The battle he was fighting had its effect on the outward man, and his face lost much of its sunny freshness. The smile was not so often on his lips, but in its place was an expression of decision of character given by experience—a wisdom bred of struggle and thoughtfulness.

He spent less of his time now in amusing the King and Queen with his music, and more of it in studying the laws of the country he was to govern, and the constitutions of the other kingdoms with which he was, as the heir-apparent to the throne, brought in contact. If the King had formerly learned to love and admire him, he now began to lean upon him. He soon found that José knew his laws better than he himself who had made them, and in times of difficulty he could depend on his heir having the solutions of the most knotty problems. As the years rolled by, José was never absent from the

King's council, and it was a common saying in the kingdom that the Prince, and not the King, ruled. But no one complained; they had never been so well ruled. Peace was within their borders; great public works had been undertaken and carried through. There was less crime, less poverty, less wretchedness than had been known in the memory of man. Yet, although fine roads were made through forests and over mountains, magnificent buildings constructed at the public expense in every town, and broad and deep canals, their taxes were not heavy. The curse of war had been removed, and so wisely had the taxes been levied, that the burden on each individual was lighter than in the olden days, when they poured out their treasure to purchase swords and battle-axes.

At times, however, the old King, whose arm was still strong, longed for the good ancient days when he charged at the head of his favorite troops into the hosts of the enemy. The sound of the trumpet, the clash of the swords, the sight of blood he still longed for. He was a warrior born and bred, and this time of peace did not altogether satisfy his kingly nature. He would often look at José and say to himself, if he would only put some of the energy into the study of battle he does into the making of laws we might extend our kingdom to the ends of the earth. But no suggestion would ever make José think of taking sword in hand. He was

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building up a great and prosperous kingdom without the shedding of blood, and that satisfied him.

In the meantime, however, the soldiers, through not occasionally whetting their swords on the helmets and weapons of their enemies, were losing some of their prowess. Playing at war was not like the real thing, and the King, with sorrow, saw his men degenerating; and, despite José's influence, he began to look about him for an occasion to give his troops an opportunity of learning what war meant with the arrows falling thickly about them and the well-tempered steel ringing on their armor.

Scarcely had he determined to put his desire into act when from over the seas and mountains came strange stories of gigantic warlike preparations. Ships were being built, great siege-engines were in process of construction, the forges of the armorers were busy day and night, and a vast host of men were assembling from the North and the South and the East.

Ever since it had been noised abroad that he had in his kingdom a wonder-working musician, the other powers had turned on him a jealous eye. They had seen with hatred the growing prosperity of their rival monarch. His ships were ploughing every sea; his commerce had increased a hundred-fold; peace, prosperity, happiness were in his borders. At the same time, they noticed that, while he was growing in prosperity, in a sense he

was weaker than they. His men no longer delighted in arms. Formerly the strong men of his country enlisted in the army or the navy; now they were to be found at the plow, in the workshops, or in the great merchant-ships that skimmed the inland sea and the ocean, laden with rich cargoes. He had become like a lion among curs; but they had the power to bite, and by uniting their forces they might be able utterly to destroy the kingdom that threatened to dominate them all. The hatred and desire for war were universal. The people desired it because they found their trade fast being monopolized by their enemy; the soldiers because they remembered how often, in the olden days, they had suffered defeat from his army; the priests because they believed José, the miracle-working one, to be of the devil.

The great king was certainly going to have an opportunity to test his men; and when he saw to what proportions the crusade had grown, he trembled for the safety of his kingdom. However, he grew young again under the prospect of a fight which he knew would be the struggle of his life. He felt he would win even against the hordes that were getting ready to invade his territory. Then, too, there was the Prince; he knew that somehow José would play an important part in crushing the invaders. If, he thought, he were by my side

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in battle, with a well-tempered sword in his hand, he would be a king indeed.

He had little time for reflection, however. Up and down his kingdom he went, stationing troops, strengthening his cities' walls, selecting places where it would be well to give battle to the enemy. He had no time to lose. The seas were black with the crowded barges bearing the armies to his shores; over the mountains came nations like a swarm of locusts. It was useless to endeavor to keep them back; his only hope was to meet them in one great fight, and, by daring and strategy, to vanquish their hosts. If he could not do this, then the end of his rule would be near at hand. However, he had determined to die in the thick of the fray before that day arrived.

Soon news of reverses began to pour in; the outlying towns had surrendered without resistance, and the fields were being laid waste as the invading army drew near the heart of his kingdom. But he did not despair. He was strong in cavalry, he knew the country, and in one great fight he would vanquish his foes; the very territory they were laying waste would battle in his behalf, as, in their retreat, their armies would perish for lack of food. Besides, his great chief city had impregnable walls, was amply stocked with food for years, and the defences were manned by an army capable of keeping a host ten times its strength at bay.

Meanwhile, José seemed to take but little interest in the impending struggle. He was more melancholy than ever at the thought of so much bloodshed, and spent much of his time alone with his harp, or with the Queen and Princess. It never entered his head that any force could vanquish the armies of the kingdom led by their great warrior King. However, the Queen at length aroused him from his uninterested state.

She received word one evening that on the morrow a great battle would be fought in the valley a few miles from the mountain palace, and close to the great White City of the plains. The King had so planned it that in case of defeat he could retreat to either place. Her eyes knew no sleep that night; but all through the dark hours she lay awake, listening to the distant sound of the gathering armies, or going to the castle towers to watch the moving lights of the host. At length day broke, and with its coming the shrill, fierce sounds of battle began to be heard among the hills. Louder and louder they grew, and even José's veins felt a fierce heat beating through them. All day the struggle went on, and from their point of vantage they could now catch glimpses of the battle as the sun flashed back from the armour and weapons of the struggling warriors, and again see the clouds of dust rolling in unbroken masses as the cavalry of the King

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dashed fiercely against the vast host, which, at the particular point where the charge was made, invariably broke and was scattered. But it was an endless host, and the front was broken only to form again with fresh troops. So the afternoon was passing, and the hopelessness of the King's struggle was beginning to make itself felt to the watchers. As José realized this, his heart began to burn fiercely within him.

Suddenly the Queen cried out in anguish. Far down the valley road she instinctively recognized, galloping riderless, the charger of the King, and simultaneously in the valley the army of her husband seemed to waver, to halt, to retreat in wild confusion. All was lost. As they approached the city they were seen suddenly to turn in their tracks. The enemy's cavalry were there before them, and now their only safety lay in the hill fortress, to which they were fleeing with death at their heels.

José grasped the situation in an instant, and made up his mind to once more try the powers of his instrument. This army was coming to seize him and bear him afar, so rumor had said. He remembered the shields, and battle-axes, and spears in the woodland cave; he would test his instrument in the thick of the fight. He rushed to his chamber, snatched his harp from its resting-place, and flew to the castle's entrance. The Queen had ordered her chariot to be prepared that she might go forth

and meet her lord as he came back victorious from the battle. The white horses in the golden car stood restlessly pawing the ground and champing at their bits. Into the car José leaped and bade the driver speed. No one ever disobeyed the Prince, and even though the Queen alone drove behind these horses, the driver knew that he would be forgiven if he disobeyed her instructions to obey the word of his future King.

Down the highroad the chariot rolled. Riderless horses, that had broken from the flying mass that could be seen struggling up from the valley, flew by him. The King's steed, the mighty black charger the Queen had recognized so far off, was among them. His reins were cut, his neck and thighs were bleeding from great, gaping wounds, and the saddle was slashed with a mighty sword cut. The King had evidently sold his life dearly. Soon they came upon strong men with the terror of pursuing death on their countenances; on men staggering along with painful wounds; on men risking their lives to help their stricken comrades to safety; on others lying by the roadside and in the road where they had fallen exhausted. But the wheels of war could not stop; over them they ruthlessly pressed.

José's heart had frozen within him. The King must be saved, or, if dead, must be avenged. The driver was not having an easy time of it; the crowd

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of flying warriors was blocking the way, and the long road into the valley was now densely packed. José suddenly remembered what he had come to do. He must check this flight; he must make courage crowd fear from the soldiers' hearts. The harp had long taught men peace and love; it must now inspire them to strike bloody blows.

He almost dreaded to make the appeal for strength in fight to the instrument which so long had brought peace only to the kingdom; but he must; and uncovering the harp while the blazing sun still shone on the earth, he smote the strings, and a fierce, inspiring music fell upon the ears of the terrified soldiers. It rose above the sounds of the fleeing army. The crowd parted before the galloping steeds and the rolling chariot; it paused, turned, and followed in the wake of the on-rushing wheels. At length, the advance of the pursuing host was reached; the enemy were ruthlessly striking down from behind men who had become unnerved and were as sheep under the butcher's knife; but, as they caught the sound of José's music, the fleeing soldiers stood firm and smote at their destroyers.

Instantly the tables were turned. The mounted men of the army were far in advance of the main host, and were exhausted with their hot pursuit and work of slaughter. They fell an easy prey to the soldiers whose hearts were renewed within them

under the magic of the music. Only a few escaped, and these rushed to the protection of the foot-soldiers with tidings that filled their fellows-in-arms with a superstitious dread that created a panic. The armies of heaven had come to the rescue of the soldiers they had just beaten. The one chariot became a thousand, the one harper an army of white-robed angels, not with harps in their hands, but with flaming swords.

While the ill news was being spread, the chariot, surrounded by the cavalry in which the great King took such pride, swept into sight.

José was now clear of the hills, and the broad valley where the battle had raged since sunrise was spread before him; and what a magnificent and horrible spectacle met his gaze! From end to end it was filled with the armies of many nations—fierce, fanatical warriors from the East and South, with glittering armour and shining swords and shields; giants from the North, great, sunny-haired fellows, with clubs and battle-axes such as the Titans might have wielded when they fought with the gods; slingers from the islands of the Great Sea, who from their cliffs could, with unerring aim, bring down the swift-winged gulls. But the host no longer presented the bold, unbroken front it had shown when José and the Queen viewed it from the fortress heights. It was jagged and broken. Some parts of it had far outstripped the others, and the

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plains, heaped with dead and dying men, and with the bodies of horses that had fallen in the fight, prevented them from advancing with the wall-like formation that could alone resist the cavalry which was now rushing like an irresistible mountain stream upon them.

Into the vanguard José drove, and, as his followers charged to left and right, the enemy's horsemen once more broke and fled, falling back upon a compact company of bowmen from the East, throwing them into utter confusion. But the gleaming chariot was upon them; they hurled one swift flight of arrows at José; but, as with Lara, their bowstrings snapped, and they, too, panic-stricken, fell back upon the main army which, at the strange conduct of the troops leading the pursuit, had been drawn up once more in battle array. The Prince, fiercely riding over dead and dying, friend and foe, clanged forth an unceasing strain from his harp, a music that was borne to his followers, even above the uproar of battle, and filled them with dauntless courage. Their only thoughts were to press close to that gleaming car, to keep within sound of that inspiring strain, and to slay. Through the compact mass in front, along the line to left and right, swept the chariot; and where it went, terror, confusion and death were left behind it. At last, the great army, casting away useless weapons, fled for their lives—all save one force

that had taken its stand on a rocky hill that jutted from the plain.

They have determined to fight till death, thought José; but no, he saw the reason of their conduct. The commander-in-chief of this vast host had taken up his stand on this hill to watch the slaughter of his enemies; and now, in the sudden overthrow of his plans and his hopes, he was not prepared for flight. He had determined to save himself, however, and as the onrushing horsemen, headed by José, came into full view, he came forth on a cliff's edge and stood in all his majesty with another warrior taller and more majestic by his side.

The Prince and his men recognized the second figure. It was the King. After all, he was not dead; he would yet be restored to his kingdom. Up the steep slope they clambered, slaying or driving back the companies that were sent out to check the advance. Before they could reach the main body, however, the leader, in a loud voice, roared out as he drew his sword: "Advance farther and your monarch shall die."

For a moment there was a panic among the victorious troops as they saw the sword raised over the King's head; and even José's hands fell from his harp. Then he wished that the King were free, and as he wished he again smote the strings; and, lo, the bonds on the hands and feet of the monarch were burst, and, unheeded of the sword

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in the hands of his enemy, he seized him in his powerful arms and hurled him headlong over the high cliff.

A wild, exulting cheer rent the air, and the advance recommenced; but the poor, cowering wretches surrendered themselves and the treasure of the army to the King whom a moment before they had been threatening and deriding.

For several days the slaughter went on, and soon, from the mountains in the North to the great rock in the South, no foe was to be found, save those who were in the crowded prisons of the King.

To the people José became more of a god than ever; and to the Princess, now that he had saved the kingdom and the King, he grew yet dearer. After the victory he once more tried to lead the quiet life he had led before the invasion, but the King was old, and had been severely wounded in the fight, and the Prince had to spend much of his time in doing the King's work in the nation. Power was his, and soon he began to delight in the power his own mind gave him over his own people and over the countries far and near on which he levied tribute.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT war had left a serious mark on the victorious nation. Many of the best men in the kingdom had been killed, many of the good works constructed in the public interests had been destroyed, and vast regions, which before had been rich in vineyards and cornfields, were now waste wildernesses. The King had been severely wounded, and for many months after the enemy had been driven from his shores, he was unable to attend to the affairs of the nation, and the Prince had to take his place in making laws, in enforcing them, in presiding over the councils of the different cities within the kingdom, and in selecting men for important offices. He had long since learned that the kingdom was weak or strong according to the strength of the Governors, and so he was ever on the watch for faithful men to do the King's will.

The chief loss, however, that had befallen the kingdom in the war was the death of José's old friend, the Governor of the great White City. He had made a last mighty effort to rally the men of his city, but had been slain at the head of a chosen few, who died to a man before the host of the enemy was able to enter the gates they had sworn to defend.

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José had, with the consent of the King, given the city into the hands of the Governor's son, who, when a lad, had endeavored to steal his harp; but he proved to be a weak ruler. The people did not trust him, and rumor of his misrule caused the King to demand an investigation, and he was found to have abused his power. The King, from his bed of sickness, demanded that he be slain; but José pleaded for milder measures, and had his way. The Governor's son was deposed, and sent across the seas; and José was to learn what ingratitude meant, for the man he had befriended began to plot his ruin; but, much as they wished it, none of the surrounding monarchs who had experienced his marvellous powers would risk taking up the exile's cause.

The city, however, was without a Governor; and as the King was thought to be growing strong enough to look after the affairs of his kingdom in general for himself, the citizens began to clamor for the Prince to come and rule over them. Their desire was not unwelcome to José. He wished to get away from the royal household. Much as he loved the Queen, much as he honored the great King, who, despite his gruffness, had many admirable qualities—he was not happy. The sorrowful face of the young Princess was ever before him. He knew what was in her heart, and, but for his vow, he would have returned her love; and the effort

to crush back his feelings had stamped his face with a sadness that was but a faint expression of the conflict that had gone on in his heart. He begged the King to give the citizens their desire. He would rule them as they had been ruled of old; he would try to guide them with the same gentle sternness that had made the former Governor such a successful ruler. His wish was granted, and to the great White City, a kingdom in itself, he went; and there was mourning in the King's high palace.

The light of day vanished from the life of the Princess, and she was never happy save when business of state called the Prince to the side of the King. Though José was installed in the late Governor's position, he was far more than a Governor. The King's wound at times still unfitted him for his high office, and much of the burden of the whole kingdom fell on José. And well did he do his work. If the kingdom had flourished before when he was but a prince, able only to suggest great works to the King, it prospered tenfold when he had the rule in his own hands. The public works that the cruel war had destroyed were restored; the country which had been laid waste by fire and sword was once more a blossoming garden, fair to the eye; and in the fields and factories the sound of the happy people singing at their work could be heard.

However, José was not happy. Late and early

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he toiled at his duties; and the people wondered how one so young could take so little pleasure out of life. Their idea of pleasure was feasting and dancing and such amusements, and in these he had no delight. Despite his efforts to get away from his own thoughts, the beautiful, sad face of the Princess would break in upon his duties and his dreams, and his heart ached within him, and not even his harp could bring comfort to his soul.

At length the King, from age and his wounds, felt that he was no longer capable of ruling his kingdom. He must rest; and he sent for the Prince; and to the delight of his people made him regent in his stead. There was, however, one condition fixed to his offer. José must marry the Princess. But José could not; he did not love the King's daughter, so he said. But the bluff King replied: "Love! who ever heard of love among Kings and Queens? The State and the people are everything. If it is well for the State, the sovereign should marry her whom he hates. A King is wedded to his kingdom; and if you are to sit secure on my throne the only child of my blood must be your Queen."

José, like a drowning man grasping at a straw, yielded to the King's wish. He could still keep his vow, he said to himself; the Princess would be but a part of his life, as were the buildings, the canals, the harbors, and the people of the kingdom.

But deep, deep in his heart he loved her with a great love; and that day at sunset, when he looked upon his harp, it seemed to shrink from him, and he could not touch its strings; and the people who were accustomed to listen eagerly for its music wondered why the master's hand refrained from touching its sacred chords on that day. On the morrow, when they heard he was to marry the Princess, the wise among them thought they understood: love had left him silent; all his thoughts were for the fair Princess. They rejoiced greatly at the news, but they rejoiced still more when they learned that he had decided to build a great palace in their city, a palace worthy of the harp and the Princess. The seclusion of the mountain castle had no temptation for him; he felt that he must dwell continually in the busy haunts of men.

Soon in the city an army of men were preparing the foundations of what was to be the greatest palace the world had ever known. Then the walls began to rise slowly, but with a perfection of beauty that far outshone anything that had ever been seen in the kingdom. José watched its growth from day to day, and in his occupation he seemed to forget about the Princess, who, in the King's palace, was anxiously awaiting word that the building was finished, for then the desire of her heart was to be granted, and she was to be wedded to José. But the Prince had not

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forgotten, and kept putting off the day of his marriage by causing delay in the completion of his palace; but at length he could delay no longer, and the vast structure stood complete in every detail.

From far and near in the kingdom people flocked to see the wonderful edifice; and from over the seas they came. Each one wished to hear the music that had wrought all the marvels they had heard about. But José rarely touched the harp now; he was depending on his own strength. He was keeping the vow in the letter while breaking it in the spirit, and he no longer seemed to have his old mastery over its strings. It would answer his touch regretfully, as it were, and only when he was alone would he dare trust himself to uncover it.

At last the day for his marriage was appointed, and it was decreed that for several weeks before that day the nation should be given over to rejoicing. Kings from far lands were bidden to the marriage feast, and from every part of the world they came. Never had there been so much wealth and beauty seen in the city, and yet the richest among them saw how much José's palace eclipsed their most magnificent buildings, and they bowed before it and its owner in reverent awe. The Prince accepted their homage like a king, and at the same time his old power over his instrument seemed to return to him. During the weeks of feasting he brought his harp into the banquet hall, and it

swayed the wills of the monarchs as it had done Lara at the gate of the city, the populace in the great square, the King and Queen in the judgment hall, the mad Princess in her cell, and the terrified mob of fleeing soldiers. Each evening at sunset he shrouded it in its mantle, and the sound of its music being stilled, he went to his chamber with a heavy heart. Still the feast went on, and during the night the brilliantly-lighted hall resounded with the notes of many instruments, but all seemed harsh and discordant after the divine music of the day.

The monarchs pleaded with the player to bring his harp into the hall during the pleasure-time of kings, night, when the polished walls and floors, the richly laden tables and the gorgeous dresses sparkled under the golden lamps that eclipsed the brightness of the sun. But José would not. At length, but one night remained for the feasting; on the morrow he would have wedded the daughter of the King, and, as regent, he would be installed in place of the King. The guests became more urgent than ever in their requests, and the Prince began to wish within himself that he could grant their desires.

As he played during that day the very harp seemed prompting him to uncover it after night-fall; and when the sun was setting it kept pleading with him, he thought, to follow the dictates of his heart. He had yielded to the tempter, and the

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instrument was longing to return to the master who had been faithful to it for a thousand years, and who was, no doubt, restlessly waiting in the forest cavern for its return to him. It seemed to say to José, the sun has not set; you, by your genius, have scattered night; the light of your hall is more brilliant than the light of day; play me to-night; gratify the Kings and Queens who have gathered here from afar to honor you, your Princess and me.

The harp was in reality merely responding to the wishes of his heart. He had broken his other vows, there was only this one to break, and the end of his greatness would come. He was but the instrument through which the power of the harp was given to the world, and now that he had failed under temptation he was to lose his power. Of this he had no thought. He listened to the voice that was luring him on; with the thought that he had created a sun greater than that of day, a sun that made the banqueting-hall of the day a commonplace thing, he consented to give one supreme evidence of his skill as a musician prince.

Into the palace, bright with its myriad lamps, lively with laughter, and gleaming like a rainbow with the colors of the gorgeous robes of the lords and ladies, queens and kings, the Prince brought the harp in its black mantle, the only dark object in the vast room. As he entered, some, even above the mirth and the laughter and the music, heard a

sudden peal of thunder rend the sky. But they heeded it not. What was a storm to them? Light and warmth and safety were theirs in this lofty banquet hall. When José seated himself on his high throne at the end of the hall, a strange, unearthly silence fell upon the crowd; and the low muttering of thunder that rolled over the broad dome was heard distinctly by all, and a fear fell upon them.

The Prince, too, was chilled with dread; but there was no turning back now. He would be the laughing-stock of the world if he refused to play after consenting to bring his harp into the festive hall—a soul-less, will-less prince he would ever seem. So he tore from his instrument the black mantle, and the blaze of the jewels of its golden frame smote upon the eyes of the guests till they were almost blinded with the light. José, too, felt the fierce glare, and reeled like a man going to his own death. But the madness of selfish desire was upon him. He struck fiercely at the strings of his instrument; but they did not respond to his touch.

A mighty cry as from a broken heart rang through the hall, and the guests in terror rose from their seats; but they stood dumb with fear. The palace lights grew dim, a blackness spread over the hall, the night was made ghastly with vivid lightning

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that flashed in at the windows; then great thundering was heard, and a storm beat against the palace; and in thunder, lightning, wind, and rain it crumbled to the ground. Not one stone was left upon another, and in the midst of the ruins of the magnificent building the terrified guests stood drenched and bedraggled—marvellous to relate, none were missing. Only the harper and his instrument could not be found. When the storm abated, the people searched diligently among the ruins. Every stone was removed, every beam was carried away; but no trace of the man who had been so much to the city and the kingdom could be found; the beloved Prince had mysteriously vanished with his wonderful harp. There was mourning in the kingdom, and much searching, but only the memory of the man who had done so much for them, and his deeds, lived in the land. Doubtless the harp had gone back to its woodland home, to gladden the birds and the beasts, and to freshen the flowers until some worthy hand could be found to carry it once more to the world of men.

CHAPTER XIV

SOME weeks after the mysterious destruction of the Prince's palace, a young woman, bare-headed and barefooted, but with a healthy country beauty, was doing a sad duty in the little plot of ground back of Fedora's cottage. On the day when the awful storm which had burst upon the palace swept up from the sea and over the hills, Mother Fedora, who had outlived her neighbor Juanita by many years, was suddenly smitten down. Alone in her hut she awaited death; but she was not to be left alone, for into her rude home limped a foot-sore woman, worn out and starving. This poor woman had come over the far hills and was a homeless wanderer. Though one of the hated gipsies, she was welcome to Fedora at such a time, and gladly did she obey the old shepherdess's feeble commands.

Her name was Zora, she had been Ismael's playmate on the hills, but the last of her people had been slain, and she was going down to the great White City, where it was said her race was ever welcome. The Prince, who now ruled, was of her tribe, so she had heard, and he ever helped those of his own blood who came to him for protection. She was glad, however, of the warmth and comfort

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of the hut and stayed with Fedora to wait upon her and to tend her flock.

The hut was now a very lonely one; the other dwellers on the mountain side had moved away, or had been taken by death, and for miles about there was no human habitation. It was, therefore, some days before a passer-by brought them word of the strange calamity that had befallen the great Prince. Fedora mourned because there was now no hope for her recovery; the harp that had given her strength was gone, and she must soon die; and Zora wept because she had dreamt that in the vast city she might be able to find little Ismael; if not, she could at least see the wonderful Prince, and, perhaps, hear his miracle-working music; but the news the traveller brought shattered her hopes, and she determined to stay with Fedora even after her recovery. She tried to find out from the old woman something about the little musician who had restored strength to her withered body, but Fedora's memory had failed her, and she did not even remember his name or the name she had given him. All she knew was that he had gone to the city, become a prince and forgotten her. Even this information she gave with so many wild and wandering words that Zora thought her mad and paid no heed to her tale.

Fedora had not long to live, and one blustery day when Zora, through the driving rain, brought

back the flock to the fold, she found that the old woman, who seemed stronger than usual when she went out, was cold in death. Zora was a strong young woman, and had seen much of death, and had helped in many a rude burial, so with her own hands she wrapped the body in a rough shroud, scooped out a shallow grave beside the one in which little Roderigo was buried, and laid good, gruff old Fedora to rest. When she returned to the hut after her sad task she was somewhat terrified at finding lying across the threshold a ragged, unkempt tramp, one of the wrecks of her own people. But she was a brave woman, and bending over the fallen man, she saw he was flushed and feverish; she saw, too, how thin he was, and knew that he must be starving. She picked him up in her strong arms and carried him to the rude bed on which the old woman had so lately lain. As she placed him gently upon it, she was startled by hearing the name "Zora" breathed as from one in a dream. She looked anxiously into the hot, thin, but finely-cut face of the sick man, and then with a strange impulse she cried, "Ismael?"

"Zora," was breathed back to her. No other word did he speak. For days, for weeks, he lay as one in a trance; and during these weeks the sheep were sadly neglected. At length his eyes opened, opened with wonder at the gentle eyes that were looking into his own.

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"Where am I?" he said.

"In Fedora's cottage, and I am Zora."

"Zora?" he said, as though trying to recall the name.

"Zora," he repeated, "with whom I played before they sold me yesterday?"

"Yesterday, Ismael! It was years ago."

"Years ago? Where have I been? Where have I been? I was sold yesterday, it seems to me, for two sheep. Where have I been since yesterday?"

"Years and years ago, I heard, that you had been sold, but more I know not. We were little children then, but some weeks ago I found you, a grown man, in rags, and sick, I thought unto death, at the hut door. You lived; that is enough; let us not try to call up the past."

But Ismael did try, but try as he would, he could not account for the years between his childhood and manhood. The last thing he remembered was the good supper the gruff old woman who had just bought him had spread before him; and then the comfort he felt in falling quietly to sleep in the warm hut. Nothing more could he recall. However, he rapidly grew strong, and soon he was able to go to the mountain pastures and watch the sheep, while Zora worked with busy hands in the garden and the hut.

One day word came to them that, in the city to which their eyes were ever turned, a holiday had

been decreed in honor of the completion of a great statue of the musician prince, who had so mysteriously disappeared; and so they determined to leave their bleating flock in the fold and go with the crowd of people that were hurrying along all the roads leading to the city. They had another object in view in taking this journey. The liking they had for each other as children had now become love; and they thought this a good time to visit one of the many holy fathers in the White City and be made man and wife.

So Ismael swung the fattest lamb of his flock across his strong back, and Zora hung from her shoulder several skins of Fedora's rich old wine; and with these presents for the priest set off down the dusty road that led to the green valley. As they approached the strong walls and towers, and saw the soldiers lining the ramparts, and heard bugle answer bugle, and the clanking of the great drawbridge that on this day was continually rising and falling to admit a crowd of sightseers, they were not a little alarmed. As Ismael gazed upon these things and heard the sounds of the city, a dim recollection awoke within him. Somewhere he had seen such things before; perhaps it was only a dream, he thought, or perhaps it was only the recollection of the stories he had heard while sitting round the camp-fires of his tribe in the long, long years before he crossed the mountains. They felt

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much safer when within the city; the crowd seemed to shelter them, and they moved about anxiously looking for a priest, but too timid to ask where one might be found.

They were not long in discovering one. A jolly, fat-faced little man, clad in a long white robe, with rough sandals on his feet, and his uncovered head, bald as an apple, shining in the sunlight, seemed to read their wishes and merrily spoke to them.

"Well, my children," he said, "if you are to be married to-day we will have to make haste about it, as there will be no time for such things when the Queen and Princess reach the city; and, hark! there is the trumpet telling of their approach."

How did he know what they wanted, they both wondered, but they were not long in letting him know their wish, and showing him their humble gifts. He led them to his little church, and, in a few simple words, made them one, and with more kindly words gladdened their hearts. Then he took them to his cell, as he called it, but in reality it was a cosy, comfortable chamber, and spread before them a feast, worth, they thought, far more than their lamb and their wine. While they ate, he told them of the Prince and his wonderful gifts, of the miracles he had wrought, and of the sad fate of the Princess, who with the Queen now ruled, and ruled well, the kingdom.

While he spoke, Ismael's eyes became dreamy

with thought. His mind was wandering far back into the past, and the tale that he heard did not seem new to him. Somewhere he had heard of the Prince and the Princess, of the harp and its miracles. But where? Think as he would, he could not tell where. It must surely have been in his boyhood dreams when he played with Zora as King and Queen. He was wakened from his thoughts by the piercing notes of a mighty trumpet.

"The Queen and Princess have entered the city," cried the father. "Let us hasten, or we will not be able to get near them for the crowd."

So out into the street they went, Zora leaning lovingly on Ismael's arm, and wearing on her breast the pure white flowers the father had given her according to the custom at marriages in those days.

The city was now alive with people in holiday dress, each one making every effort to get a good position from which to see the royal pageant pass. At length the guards sent ahead to clear the road for the royal car came in sight. Leading them was the giant Lara, straight and tall, and splendid in complete armor.

"Look, look!" cried the father, "there is the finest soldier in the kingdom. It was he who guarded the Prince when he first came to the city. What legs he has! and what a chest!"

Zora was clinging tremblingly to her husband's

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arm. She feared the great soldier, and his gleaming sword, tall as an ordinary man. She feared him still more when he roared out a greeting to the priest.

"Ho, Father Pedro, at your old tricks! tying knots even on a holiday! Well, well! the wench is a fair one. Ho, ho! afraid of me; a kiss for that!"

He threw back his visor; and Zora, dumb with fright, felt his great, rough, kindly face pressed to hers.

"Here, lass," he said, taking from his pouch a golden chain, "here is a marriage gift for you. By Our Lady, if this lout had not been before me, and I am ever late, I would have wedded thee myself."

He pressed the chain into her trembling hand, laughed a great gruff laugh, clinked his visor shut, and advanced towards the square where the statue had been erected.

Ismael was as one in a trance; somewhere surely in the past he had heard that voice; and he tried to recall the life he must have lived during the long years since the day he was sold for two sheep and the day on which Zora found him lying at the hut door, but it was all a blank. Still the towering form of Lara and his thundering voice remained in his mind as familiar things.

At last the royal car with the Queen and Princess rolled by, and in its wake was an army of soldiers. The citizens pressed eagerly after it, and in this

crowd Father Pedro and Zora and Ismael found themselves borne along. When the square where the statue was had been reached, the father managed to get a good position near the Queen and Princess, where he could not only see the statue to advantage, but could even hear the words of the Queen as she addressed the multitude which assembled before her.

To Ismael the crowd seemed familiar. That splendid figure, too, with the golden harp in its hands, he seemed to have known; and both he and Pedro were startled by hearing Zora say, "How like the statue is to thee, my Prince"; and she laughed as she said it and pressed his hand affectionately, thinking how much happier she was than the beautiful Princess, who had naught but a marble image to love.

Another one present had noticed a resemblance between Ismael and the artist's production of the Prince. The Princess, who had been sweeping her eye over the crowd and thinking of José, had seen it, and beckoning to Pedro, bade him bring the newly-wedded couple to her. She gazed long into Ismael's face, and he returned her gaze, wondering where he had seen her before. Then she sighed deeply, and pressing a purse into Zora's hand, bade them be happy.

It was a long, weary day for Ismael and Zora, but at last it was over; and in the cool of the evening, foot-sore and happy and rich, they toiled

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up the hill-slopes to their little hut—their home. When they went with a torch to the sheepfold to see to their flock, they saw that the door was broken and that the ground about it was sprinkled with blood and wool.

"The wolf, the wolf!" cried Zora, in alarm, "he has been here in our absence—the wolf that Fedora ever talked about, ever dreaded."

Into the sheepfold Ismael rushed, but the wolf was not there, and in the farthest corner the sheep were huddled together in a trembling mass. Only one had been taken; the fattest one, it is true; but Lara's chain and the Princess's purse made them forget their loss.

After this, however, when Ismael went to the hill pasture with his sheep, he kept a careful eye for the wolf; and always set out armed with the great knife that he found hanging on the wall of the hut. But the wolf did not return for many days, and Ismael became less watchful; and he would lie in the sunlight and make rude whistles, on which he tried to play to his flock after the manner of shepherds, but could only produce a harsh and discordant noise that greatly amused Zora. Poor Ismael, he longed to sing and to play; and he had dreams that once he could play and sing; but when and where? It must have been in the lost years of his life. But no; he had then been a poor, homeless tramp, he thought, whose mind had been

unhinged by the sufferings his people had undergone on their long march over the mountains. He began to dream very much as little José had dreamt so many years before, and two of his flock wandered from his sight. One he recovered, but by the edge of the dark forest he came upon the wool, blood, and bones of the other.

He drove his sheep home, shut them in the fold, whetted his knife, and taking a strong bow and arrow, went out boldly in search of the robber. Into the black forest he courageously marched, tracking the wolf by the blood-stained pieces of wool that were left as the beast had dragged to its lair bits of the carcass. He at length came upon it, snarling and fierce. Then he fitted an arrow to his bow, took steady aim, and drove the weapon to its shaft in the great side of the savage beast. But the wolf was only wounded, and sprang in fury upon Ismael. He seized it by the throat with a firm grip, swung his knife fiercely with his strong right hand, and, splitting the head of the brute in twain, it fell dead at his feet.

He stood a moment looking in triumph on the beast he had slain, then went to work with his sharp knife and tore the thick black skin from the body and carried it down the mountain and cast it at Zora's feet. "My Prince," she cried, "my hero!"—and he trembled as he heard her words; somewhere in the past such words had been addressed to him

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by other lips, but he knew not where, nor by whom. It mattered not. He was as happy as a king, without a king's care; and to him Zora was more beautiful than even the Queen or the Princess.

How happily they lived together in their humble home, and how prosperous they became! Their flock increased so much that a new fold had to be built, and either Ismael or Zora had to make frequent visits to the White City to sell what their industrious hands produced. Once a year they went together, not to sell or to buy, but to worship.

The Prince was now deemed a saint, and it grew to be a custom for people to prostrate themselves before his statue and ask his protection; and Ismael and Zora never failed to make their annual visit, and with the other pilgrims uncovered their heads and bowed in the dust before the image of the man who had made the kingdom so strong, that, though he was no more in the land, it was safe from foreign invasion and from internal strife.

As the years flew by a little curly-headed lad, with a face very like the face carved in the marble, went with them. He was named José, after the good saint, and as his parents prayed for happiness and prosperity, he offered up his childish prayer for protection from wolves and bears and bad men; and he was protected by the very José of the statue, though he knew it not.

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